Wordeater#71

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE 1990

Lawrence's Wordeater entry is put on hold when he's hit with writer's block.

WORDEATER 71 STAFF

Judy Belfield, Alex Bennett, Sue Cherven, Jerry Janes, Bob Loewe, Maria Mellinger, John Stobart

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

POETRY-$5 EACH TO:

Norma Dodge
Sherry Gunderman
Jay J. Kaylin
Maria Mellinger

PROSE-$5 EACH TO:

Alex Bennett
Walter Coffey
Sherry Gunderman
Bob Loewe
Maria Mellinger
Shonda Talerico

COVERS-$20 TO:

Dave Gardner

Manuscripts or cover designs for

WORDEATER 72

must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

April 12, 1990

Manuscripts will not be returned and should be typed.

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wordeater 71

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Jay J. Kaylin

MURGLEFLURGLEFLICKITYTICKITYTAT

I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flicity-tickity-tat
Please look at where you sat
Close this book!
and take a look!
take a look at, where you just sat
Because I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flickity-tickity-tat
and you just sat on my zamp
and you sat on my boo-bamp
and you sat on my kiss-zackle
and now my rickity-brickity-brackle
is all out of wackle

So the next time, before you have sat
don't forget to ask,
and ask about me
to someone you can see
if they know where I might be at
Because I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flickity-tickity-tat.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

ROMP

Little boy looked at me with
little boy eyes twinkling
squeezed tight wrinkling
in delight,
smiled that little boy smile
wide ear to ear--
Little Devil,
I think,
I'm gonna grab you up
carry you off
when your Momma's not lookin.
We'll do Patty-Cakes
say "Georgie-Porgie"
play peek-a-boo
up and down the house
all the livelong day...
It's been a long time
since I had a baby.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

IN WHICH POOH DISCOVERS WHO PRECISELY HE IS

One clear day of a day Winnie-the-Pooh began to think. He thought about thinking and he thinked about thoughting and he sang a little song about thinks and thoughts, which went like this:

It is right and ought,
To think and thought,
To rub my tummy and sigh,
To dream of honey
And places sunny
And who precisely am I?

at which point he stopped his song and thought (or thinked), "Who am I?"

And so Pooh put all thoughts out of his mind (which wasn't hard, being a Bear of Very Little Brain who thought mostly of naps and honey, which were, in fact, hard thoughts to put out of mind when one is a tired and hungry bear such as Pooh, which led his mind to think again, "Who am I?") and went out to ask his friends, "Who am I?"

Under the large beech-tree that was Piglet's home he found his small friend, who was, in fact, a Very Small Animal. "Who am I?" Pooh asked Piglet.

"Well," said Piglet. "*I* am the Grandson of Tresspassers W., and I have a new scarf to keep me warm."

"I see," said Pooh, "but could you possibly tell me, if it's no trouble, Who am *I* ?"

"You're Winnie-the-Pooh," said Piglet, "and you're my friend."

"Hmmm..." Pooh rubbed his left ear as he hummed his Hmmm..., shifting his thoughts to his right ear, and not hearing, he believed, a proper answer to his question.

Several trees later he met his good friend Rabbit. "Hallo, Rabbit," he said. "I wonder if you could tell me Who I am?"

"You're Winnie-the-Pooh," said Rabbit. "Have some honey," he added nervously (or perhaps worriedly, for he wondered how Pooh had forgotten to recognize himself and asked "Who am I?").

Winnie-the-Pooh sat down to a delicious pot of honey and never stopped thinking and thoughting throughout the meal. "Who am I?" he thinked. "Who am I?" he thought. And he made up another song as Rabbit hopped home with the empty honey pot. It went like this:

Am I a worker,
A doctor or clerk or
Mailbox attendant
For letters send-ant?

(continued)

In Which Pooh Discovers Who Precisely He Is, continued

Am I a learner,
A page in a book turner,
A reader of poet-ry,
Who, precisely, is me?

And by coincidence, or another large word meaning "strange and unusual happening," Owl flew down to Pooh's side. "Hallo, Pooh," said Owl, a Very Good Learner. "How's things?"

"I wonder if you might tell me," said Pooh, "being a Very Good Learner, and myself a Bear of Very Little Brain, "Who I am?"

"You are a Winniecus-laticus-el-Poohmus," replied Owl, "which, translated, means you are Winnie-the-Pooh."

"Thank you," said Pooh, although he did not understand (but was a Bear of Great Politeness).

Next he happened upon Eeyore, who, when Pooh asked "Who am I?" replied, "You're far better off than I am, I expect. No wonder...being a Pooh Bear."

With this, Winnie-the-Pooh put his head between his paws and thought about thinking until Christopher Robin walked by. "Hallo, Pooh," he said, "do you have a headache?"

"No," answered Pooh. "But a thought has been thinking at me all day, and I can't find an answer for it."

"Sorry, what was the question?" asked Christopher Robin.

"Who am I?" said Pooh.

With this Christopher Robin began to laugh as only a young boy sitting with his bear can, and replied, "Silly Old Bear, you're Winnie-the-Pooh, and I love you!"

"I see," said Pooh, and this time he did see. He was Winnie-the-Pooh, and that's all he needed to be.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

A DRAGON

A dragon who lived in a glen
Was feared by all women and men.
He let out his breath,
And spewed instant death.
The survivors bought him some Sen-Sen.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

THE NUTTONGLUTTON

I am the Nuttonglutton
and I live in your bellybutton
Now there's no need to get mad
and no need to pout
if you want me out
Just shake your belly all about
and shout "sauerkraut, sauerkraut,
get out, out, out,
get out of my bellybutton
you silly old Nuttonglutton."

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

LIKE EDWARD BEAR

Like Edward Bear
bump
bump
bumping
down the stair,
you've taken my heart
and made it a part
of all of the everything
for which you care.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

DODGE-ING NURSERY RHYMES

Hansel and Gretel were put on their mettle
To escape form the wicked witch.
Hans said to Gret,
"Now, don't you sweat,
I know we can fool the old bitch.

*****

Mary and her little lamb
Are well known far and near
When Mary's lamb became a sheep,
She had to learn to shear.

*****

Little Boy Blue and his famous horn
Are beloved of every child
But his parents took his horn away.
It really drove them wild.

*****

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

I OFTEN WRITE ABOUT DAD

I often write about Dad
Because Mom is just like me.
She usually thinks as I do,
Likes doing what I do,
And excels at what I like.
I can't write about her.
Writing about Mom
Is writing about myself.
I was never very good at that.
If I don't write about you, Mom,
Please understand,
It's not because I love you less.
I understand you more.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

FIVE LOUSY POEMS

Five lousy poems are all I got
Out of last night--
He got drunk,
She got laid,
Our host got trouble,
And I got a big nothing
That I stuffed with words.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

ARTIST'S SONG

Art is my music,
for it makes my soul dance,
A soft sweet melody,
of pastel watercolors
draped against the canvas,
the hues blend together softly and delicately.

A sharp industrial strength hard core beta,
I turn it up loudly,
Splashes of neon brights,
and fire engine reds
SHOCK
the canvas,
setting it on fire and
setting my soul to dance.

§§§§§§

Thomas J. Goode

A BROTHER'S TALE

The morning sun shone with all the promise of a beautiful late summer day. My brother and I were up earlier than normal for a Saturday. We had a job to do. A man from the Raven's Club was going to pick us up at eight o'clock and take us to a spot in the country where we would set trap, clay pigeons, for several men who wanted to practice their shooting. My brother was sixteen and I was twelve.

"How much do you think they will pay us for setting trap?" I asked my brother as he gobbled down the last of his breakfast.

"Probably five dollars," he answered.

"That's not bad," I said. "Is that each?"

"Yeah, five dollars each," he stated. Soon our ride pulled up and honked the horn.

"Let's go," said my brother and off we went.

There wasn't much conversation while the man drove us through town and out into the country. Several other men were already there when we arrived at our destination. They seemed to be laughing and joking about something. After we greeted the others, it was time to do some shooting. My brother and I carried boxes of clay pigeons to the pit in the ground that housed the machine which threw the clay dishes far into the air. the pit had a roof over it so we were protected and unseen by the shooters behind us. We climbed in and got settled.

"Ready?" yelled one of themen.

"We're ready," my brother yelled back. He loaded the machine with a clay disk.

"Pull!" said somebody. My brother pressed the button of the machine and sent a disk flying into the air. There was a loud bang and the disk was pulverized.

"Good shot!" someone exclaimed. We kept loading the machine and letting one fly every time someone yelled pull. After about an hour, someone yelled to us that it was break time. We crawled out of the pit. The men were standing behind the back of a pick-up truck. They popped their beer cans open. My brother and I walked slowly toward the river. There was a whole herd of cows grazing by the river's edge. My brother picked up an acorn and threw it hard at the backside of a cow. The startled cow ran into another cow ahead of it. I started throwing acorns too. Before long, all the cows were stampeding themselves off the three-foot-high river bank into the water. It was quite a sight to see so many cows plunge into the river and swim to the other side. All of them did except the last one. It wasn't a cow. It was a bull! He stopped abruptly at the river's edge and turned around to face us.

He was stomping mad. The bull actually lowered his head and started digging at the ground with a front hoof.

(continued)

"Oh-oh!" exclaimed my brother. "Head for the trees!" Behind us was a five-foot in diameter tree. We ran to it with the bull charging close behind. Around the tree we ran for our lives. The bull was trying to horn us. After about five laps around the tree with the bull getting even closer to our tails, my brother screamed to head for the cornfield the next time around. We did. The corn was higher than our heads. We ran about one-hundred yards into the field. The bull didn't follow us into the cornfield. When we thought it was safe, we came out of the cornfield. The bull had left. We headed back to set more trap.

This story is funny to us now, but we were not laughing at the time. This a true story and not a lot of bull.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

GHOST STORIES

It was hot. So verrrry hot. I attributed the heat to it being the last week of July in a southern sector of Pennsylvania. I was nineteen and had been forced to take a "family vacation" to nowhere in particular in a whale of a Winnebago that smelled of moth balls and had NO air conditioning...while civilization as I knew it flourished in the greater Chicagoland area--some 600 miles behind us. What I had to look forward to was visiting Lancaster and watching the Amish drive around in their buggies, touring wax museums in Gettysburg, and the heat. I was sarcastic and I was a brat and I was a whiner and I didn't like the heat. And it was hot...very hot.

The Holstein of a Dalmation pushed me out of the way to angle a better view of panoramic Gettysburg. I gasped at the thought that these avenues of tourist traps had once been the stage for the turning point of the Civil War.

We stopped our "Wonderbus" for an early dinner at an in-town restaurant. My father (the comedian that he is) chortled over the thought of bringing toy guns onto the battlefields at dusk and scaring other sightseers witless as we paraded as specters from the war. I thought of how nice a swimming pool would be.

We finished our dinner and drove down winding roads through battlefields and monuments until we reached "Artillery Ridge Campground." The wooden sign by the side of the freshly tarred road was done from cut wood. Someone had taken a lot of time on that sign...

The trailer that I had fondly dubbed "The Bismarck" pulled off of the road and into a small paved lot. Everyone, including the dog, got out to register at the office. I assumed that it wouldn't take long, and sat in the trailer's doorway and watched children play in the pool that was adjacent to the office. The chlorine was intoxicating. I cynically counted off on my fingers how many days I had left in the traveling sauna and studied the cars that whizzed past our depot on their unknown course to an unknown destination.

The sun had peaked in the sky and was beginning to fall. My patience had worn thin from waiting, and I wondered if it was any cooler in the office.

I opened the door and was hit with a refreshing blast of almost cold air that made me feel like a martyred fool for sitting in the heat for so long. The office was a store as well as a registration spot. There was Civil War memorabilia adorning all four walls. Portraits of Grant. Portraits of Lee. What side had these decorators sympathized with? Above bric-a-brac cannons and Confederate flags were issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Fishing Life*. A huge freezer with glass doors advertised 2% milk on a scribbled page of marker posted rates and expenses.

I turned to see with whom my family was entranced. It was a forty-five-year-old man. He reminded me of a Buddha statue, the way he stood behind the paneled counter and played with the wispy strands of hair on his balding head. He was wearing a navy and gray striped Polo that barely covered his enormous stomach, and when he spoke, he revealed a mouthful of assorted and missing teeth. He frightened me at first, but welcomed my entrance with a hearty, "Hello there!" and I was intrigued by my family's fascination at what he was telling them.

This man was a born storyteller. He could have been a preacher the way he held his audience with a crooked finger and a timely pause to capture his breath. He was telling my family about the ghost sightings that he had heard about over the years in Gettysburg. He relayed them with the passion and excitement of the moment...and for this I leaned in closer.

My parents realized that they had been gawking, and decided to go hook up the trailer to the water and electricity. My brother and I stayed to hear more from this stranger. he professed sanity and honesty, and continued.

"...and these guys...they were from this very campground. They snock onto the battlefields at night--y'see?" We nodded.

"And they wan't drinkin' or anything, because I had helped them out there...and a half hour later they're back and they're all out of breath and pale as anything and I asked 'em what happened and they tol' me."

He paused for effect and we moved closer so as not to miss another word or decided smack of his lips. His long vowel accent started up again with more energy.

(continued)

"See, the one guy's great great grandpa had been killed in the Civil War. Here, at Gettysburg. And they was snooping around the monuments when they heard somebody coming out of the trees. They ducked down behind that Minnesota Monument as bes' they could and watched. And what they saw was SOLDIERS comin' out of those trees and they was carrying canteens and guns and they was all white and glowing! And the one called the one boy by name! It was his grandpa! And the poor kid nearly died right there from fright! And they went runnin' back here and didn't stop and didn't look back--let me tall ya! And they told me their story and it was real genuine, Kid," and he tugged at my brother's sleeve as he made a disbelieving face.

"...and the group of them left that night! Said they'd stay at a hotel in town, they did, and left after they'd paid in full and everything!"

My brother turned to go. "I'm gonna go swimming," he informed us.

"They were drunk," he whispered to me as he left. I smiled at his humor, but stayed to hear all that this man would tell me. He rambled on about lights that still go off on the battlefields at night...marsh lights...where bodies let off gasses that mix with the air and make fluorescent glows to this day--125 years later. he told me about the creek behind the campground where bullets still wash ashore and the cries in the night that even he has heard. I couldn't believe the fabricated history that spewed from this man's mouth. Devil's Den that was only a block down the road where sharpshooters hid between massive rocks and bumped off Union generals who watched from the wooded hill of "Little Big Top." The Gettysburg Cemetery where Lincoln had given the Gettysburg Address that has dazed figures roaming its grounds past sunset. And the eerie feeling that EVERYONE reports after visiting the battlefields. The silence and aura is overwhelming...supposedly. My skepticism was melting away with each story that he told me. The sun had set and the moon had risen when he had to go and I had to rejoin my family. I stepped into the humid heat of the night and turned to thank him as he locked the office door.

"You've chosen a fine night to stay here," he told me. "It's a full moon tonight," he whispered through his dreadful teeth as he motioned to the sky. "Stay awake and sit by the window and I bet you'll see somethin'," he promised.

My eyes widened at his prophecy. He said goodbye and I walked away down the gravel drive to find my trailer. The full moon peeked through leaves in the tall trees that shadowed the walk. I kicked a few pebbles out of my way and began to walk faster.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

LITERATURE

The verbal page
was deocorated with blue
horizontal
lines.
And words
that were difficult
to fathom
belonged
in the margins.
And grades
and futures
were determined
by the mood
of the reader

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

MY TAPES

My tapes
His tapes
Your tapes
Our tapes--
How should I know
Who to love
When there's so much
Music?

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

THOUGHT PROVOKING IMAGE

For every chartreuse cat whisker
in the world,
a luminescent toad shit
lies between zero and infinity.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

THE DISTANT BUZZING OF A FLY

The distant buzzing of a fly
Sounded like a fair maiden's
Mournful cry,
So I silenced it
With my dragon of a flyswatter;
And bid her goodbye.

§§§§§

Jenny Hillenbrand

THE HUE OF THE TREE

The fluorescent lamp light,
on an overhung green limb, in summer,
when there is no wind,
gives the pigment of the branch
the most incredible hue of enchantment.
The world freezes.
and lit it should be in a black and white photograph,
The tree poses.
The glow only scratches the surface of a tree,
deep,
black,
thick,
dense,
branches
touched, only so slightly.
No sunlight could do this.
The sunlight penetrates, disarms, violates,
every nook of the tree.
You are exposed to the gaps of the limbs
No mystery, only beauty in the daylight.
Whereas the man made light,
like man,
creates mystery.
The black penetrates and occupies the tree
as animals do in the day,
consuming it,
So that only this glowing,
radio active,
incandescent,
sterile,
radiant light
pays it any compliment.
You must see it someday.
The hue of the tree.
On some evening stroll, by streetlight.
Notice this phenomena,
How a man made treachery, can enhance nature's beauty,
is beyond me.
But do believe the exquisite beauty of this match,
of man to nature

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

T.V.

Something noticeably stupid or foolish being viewed from an electronic system that transmits transient images of fixed or moving objects together with sound over a wire and is contained in a ridged typically rectangular receptacle with a cover.

§§§§§

Jerry Janes

2:45 am

Laying in bed, music fades...away,. wiping off my face, wiping off my face, wiping off my face. Nose gets drier.

Observe.

The reeds whistle to me, reminiscent of seaweed--waving in the moon-driven vibrations of the water weather at the very bottom of the sea.

The guitar is the hurried timekeeper, running for his master's business, admitting the secondary fancy of God's heartbeat. His heartbeat keeps the time. The time instructs the beat. The beat instructs the drum skins to vibrate from the strokes of the rhythm keeper, the slave.

All other musicians dance and frolic in the security of his captivity.

The music fades, for a new song is approaching, new, for my consideration.

I take a drink of water. I think about.....
.....
.....
.....
.....everything.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

WHEN YOU WAKE UP IN THE MORNING

When you wake up in the morning
I am still asleep, so many time zones away.
You eat breakfast, go to work, take a break,
And I awake.
I begin my day, thinking of you,
Working or reading, busying myself
In the tasks of being without you.
You continue working, have lunch or
A rest, thinking of me,
Busying yourself with being the one who left.
Someone in my evening and your night
We intercept each other's time lines and
Talk for minutes or hours; we're never sure.
Order is restored,
No matter what time of day,
By the simple rewinding of our relationship.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

TO DAWN

To Dawn,
the girl who lost her heart
in the wishing well.
And although she peered
into its blackness
and called out
into its deepness,
she heard only her own voice
echoing
from the depths
telling her
that her heart was gone
and nothing will be the same
again.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

MARCEI

Marcei Baldetti has spices on her cheedk,
Marcei Baldetti has tomatoes on her feet.
Marcei Baldetti has noodles in her nose,
and Marcei Baldetti has macaroni between her toes.
Marcei Baldetti has cheese on her chair,
Marcei Baldetti has meatballs in her hair,
and Marcei Baldetti really doesn't care,
cause Marcei Baldetti likes her spaghetti- -everywhere.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

I HAVE THIS THEORY

I have this theory
That if I don't try to love you,
Then I won't fail, and we will be
Together for many years;
Separate, alone,
Joking about what could be
If it weren't for the
Damn theory.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

MARIA

It's jealousy
Essentially unmitigated
Jealousy
I envy you
You have the craft
You have experience
I envy you
I have the dream
The sheer electric desire
That is necessary
In love
In sex
In poetry
The physiological need
For expression
My words may be nothing
In the end
Trite, trivial or frivolous
Perhaps not
Envy causes me
To study the craft
And cross it with my creativity
Perhaps someday I will be great
And you will be partly responsible
For my success
Because your work created
Unmitigated, insatiable
Jealousy

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

WAITING FOR FREDDY

I met Nikki and Jenny when my sister was in the hospital. I couldn't stand to be alone in the house all the time while my parents were visiting Ann. They always invited me along, but I just couldn't bear to go and see my sister sitting there being proud of herself because she was on one thousand milligrams of something when her roommate was only on seven hundred and fifty and therefore wasn't as sick. I went just the same--sometimes.

I spent most of my time either in school or at my job (which occupied thirty five hours of the week). The rest of the time I spent surrounding myself with as many people as I could. Nikki and Jenny were always there. They needed me as much as I needed them.

On weekends, we would go to the movies, or to a play if any of the high schools in the area were doing one. We tried to avoid parties. Nikki and I always had to carry

(continued)

Jenny to the car after a party. Most of the time she was only drunk. We had blindfolds for other occasions when she would take one hit too many.

Jenny's father used to send her checks in the mail. He had divorced her mom and moved to California, where he remarried. He was the type of guy who would solve people's problems with plastic. Maybe he thought he was buying her the life she always wanted. Maybe he was.

I only met Jenny's mother once. It was loathe at first sight. I can't blame her much for hating Nikki and me. Whenever we would bring Jen home, her mother would have to drive her back to where the party was the night before to pick up her car. Her mother never did figure out why Jenny's keys kept getting locked in the trunk.

Nikki had different problems. Her stepfather just plain had it in for her. Whatever went wrong was Nikki's fault. Her stepfather hated me too. He told me so. I tried not to be there when he got home from work. If I was, he'd start badgering me about when my "weird" sister was going to get out of the hospital. I only sought him out once--I needed someone to yell at. I think that was the only reason he tolerated me--I fought back.

Nikki and I learned that if we could find somewhere for Jen to drink besides parties, we could keep her away from the drugs. Every Friday night after going somewhere, we would stead a bottle of whiskey from Nikki's stepfather and go out to a tent she had set up in the woods the family owned behind the house. A fifth was too small an amount to be noticed, and he usually couldn't find his way out the door on Friday night, let alone find the tent.

The three of us would zip ourselves up inside, open the bottle and start telling the events of the week. About three in the morning, Nikki's sister would sneak out of the house to the tent, and the three girls would finish the bottle and engage in "girl talk" while I politely pretended to be asleep. I never did like whiskey, but I do have performance ratings on most everybody in my class. No one ever figured out how I always knew who was fucking who--and how well they were doing it!

We had been "camping out" on Friday nights for about two months when I told the girls I was having trouble sleeping because of a dream I kept having over and over. Every night, I would start to feel sick. Then, my sickness would intensify into pain which turned into an awful, itchy, scaly, scratchy, insect-like feeling under my skin. When I looked down, I would see knots moving around under the surface, itching and searing their way across my body. I would start scratching, then ripping and tearing away at my skin, trying to get at the bugs. Then my fingers would start turning scaly and get longer until they formed tendrils that would wriggle and writhe around my bones and intestines, creating icor wherever they touched my body. Festering globs of flesh would drop away, then larger pieces of rot. Soon, the bed would be covered with a puddle of gore and pus with a foul stench. The tendrils wouldn't stop. After finding I had no more body to devour, they would drive themselves through my eyes. Sometimes I woke up. Sometimes I think I passed out and then woke up.

Nikki said it wounded like Freddy Krueger had taken over my dreams. Jenny said it sounded like Freddy didn't have to. I tried to figure out who Freddy Kreuger was. I didn't have anyone in my class named Freddy. I didn't know a Freddy. Why would a Freddy want to take over my dreams? I asked and was rewarded with laughter. Nikki and Jenny vowed that, on the next Friday (not the thirteenth), they would take me to see "A Nightmare on Elm Street."

The next morning, while the girls complained about the cat marching around on their sleeping bags, I tried to figure out if I needed any more "nightmares" in my life. Had it not seemed so important to them, I might not have gone to see the movie. But it was, and I did.

I spent the entire movie munching popcorn and waiting for the scary part. People getting cut open wasn't scary; it was sick--gross, perhaps, but not scary. The plot wasn't scary. The makeup wasn't scary. Where was the scary part?

As we walked out of the theater, I saw girls clutching their boyfriends' arms. I didn't get it. When we got to the car, Jen asked me what I thought of the movie. All I could do was stand there, shrug my shoulders and sheepishly say, "I guess I missed the scary part." No one talked on the way back to Nikki's.

It was a hot night. All the tent flaps were open, and the three of us were lying there in our underwear watching the mosquitoes bounce continuously off the netting. My head was propped up in the corner on the only pillow. The girls were drinking and laughing and cheering. They had each picked a drop of sweat at my collarbone and were having a race to see which one would hit my waistband first. Every time the lead changed, they both took a drink, and whoever was losing had to take a long pull. After the race, Nikki just laid flat and looked at the tent flap.

"You still having your dreams, Danny?"

I replied that I was having a new dream that was even worse than the old scaly tendril one. I started to tell eager listeners about it, but they stopped me halfway through. They said they really didn't want to hear.

Nikki's sister never came out to the tent that night. I guess she looked in and went back to the house, because the next Monday it was all over school about how Danny Fenquist was having this orgy with two girls in a tent.

(continued)

Actually, I think the rumor promoted my popularity.

I woke up about three because the whiskey bottle rolled up against my leg as it was kicked around the tent. It was cold. As I pitched the bottle out of the tent, I noticed it was half full. I looked to my left and saw Nikki sleeping fitfully. On my right, Jenny was looking at my back.

"I can't sleep," she whispered.

"Freddy?"

"Yes."

"I'm supposed to be the one with the nightmares." I wasn't trying to be funny, but she looked at me with weary eyes.

"Don't worry about Freddy; he's no match for those tendrils."

I formed my hand as nearly as possible into the shape of the picture of "The Monkey's Paw" in our Lit book. After I lad back again, Jen put her head on my ribs and curled up in my right arm to sleep. Five minutes later, Nikki did the same on my left.

I spent the rest of the night dreaming of ways to get Freddy. I practiced hitting targets in the far corners of my imagination with the tendrils that had changed. Now they looked like ordinary fingers until I wanted them to attack something. Upon my will, they would instantaneously change form. Sprouting eyes, they would aim themselves exactly at the point I wanted to hit. I was a tendril marksman and could outshoot Billy the Kid because my fingers would have a gun out of his hand before he could squeeze the trigger. Freddy would be no match for me.

When I woke up in the morning, Nikki had gone to the house to use the bathroom. Jen was still asleep with her head on my ribs, so I just lay there and put my left arm around her. She woke up before Nikki came back and looked up at my face.

"What did you dream you were doing, Danny?"

"Waiting for Freddy."

"He won't ever come."

"I know."

"Were you scared?"

"No." She put her head back down and went back to sleep.

Our meetings continued for another two months, when Jen was shipped off to California to live with her father. She had just started an alcohol abuse program before she left. When I was in California last, I brought one of those old bottles, filled it with flowers and put it on top of Jen's stone. The caretaker was not amused. Jen's new stepmother was outraged, but I think Jen smiled somewhere.

Nik is married now. She can't even take a sip of anything alcoholic without getting sick. Her kids are cute. Little Jenny is adorable.

My sister got out of the hospital, and I really like her much better now. I don't have nightmares very much any more, but when I do, I start looking for Freddy.

I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life waiting for Freddy. I just wish Jen were still here asleep against my ribs when I awake from my vigil.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

VIKKI

This is the poem
I always wished you'd write.
It's too late now.
You say you're happy
With Chuck and the second one
"On the way."
You're going to write a book
As soon as you get organized
And write down your ideas
Before they're "forgotten."
And you're going to start a business,
When you find one you like.
You will never pick up a pen
Because you don't smile anymore,
And you will never start a business
Because you are afraid to dream,
And you will never be "happy" with Chuck
Because you remember what it is to be "happy"
And you know that you're not.
I know it too,
Because the greatest dreamer I knew
Doesn't write anymore.
Don't worry,
I won't tell Chuck.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

CLAW-LIKE

Claw-like
Sharpened,
Nasty;
Nails on a blackboard
You sigh.
Quiet,
Muffled,
Baby-talk
I dream a
Definitive goodbye.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

A ROSE BY NATURE

Once, in a field,
Beautiful frail white flowers
Grew in circles of bushes.
Beautiful and harmless.
Save one
With a thorn on its side.
Just one.
Into this frail white field
Came an ordinary beast
Who picked all the flowers
And arranged them "artistically."
Save one
With a thorn in its side.
Just one.
A great wreath was made
With one huge bare spot
That was unfillable.
No flower hurt the beast
Save one
With a thorn in its side.
Just one.
It dyed itself red
To mourn the other dying flowers
Then dug in its roots
Producing more reds
Each one
With a thorn in its side.
Every one.
Frail white flowers died.
Red flowers came up.
They were beautiful and frail,
Now they're perfect.
Each one
With a thorn in its side.
Every one.

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

LIFE?

The said little eyes
looked up at me,
The questioning look
That I could see
Was questioning life
And what it's worth.
Doesn't death begin
The day of birth?

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

JULY AGAIN

Long after the sun sets
and the last of the neighborhood kids
have been called in for a hot bath,
I sit on the warped bottom step
of my back porch.
The sky is a glowing, deep blue
like the blue in a set of Crayola markers,
and chilled blades of overgrown grass crowd themselves
into the spaces between my bare toes.
Beads of moisture tango down my glass of lemonade
leaving a ring shaped puddle when I pick it up,
and particular thoughts of the day
are placed aside by the unseen music of crickets.
Lightning bugs find it the right darkness
to come out and say hi
(the moon and some stars do too)
and its just about then
when tears take the place of what's missing.
You.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

POINSETTIAS

I always wanted to write
A poem on a perfect flower
Everyone else has
Why shouldn't I cliche too?
I just hadn't found one
Until now.
I have one in my hand
Bright scarlet petals
Evergreen leaves
Never needs water
Never needs sunlight
Never dies
Never wilts
Made to last
Made in Taiwan.
It will definitely
Brighten the city dump.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

December 20th

Three hundred
and sixty-five days
do not feel like that many
when I compare them
to how many times
I have played this day over
in my memory.
I cannot seem to lose touch with
your grey EXP
Bennigans
Water Tower
& The Wild Pair.
Columbia,
taxi-cabs,
street musicians,
window shopping
and Santa Claus.
Bloomingdale's...and those damn leather gloves...
...what I would have given to have been *her*.
Your husky laugh,
secrets we shared--
and the way you touched my knee.
"Beetlejuice"
my Christmas tree
Dawn and Mike
and the way you shut the door behind yourself--
that said it all--
and set the calendar in motion...
...365 days.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

PUT ME IN COACH, I'M READY TO PLAY

Four years of Catholic school were about to end. That thought, like a death row inmate's thoughts after the governor calls, monopolized our minds. We sat numbly in the forty-year-old desks, watching the 200-year-old nuns who were our teachers, and realized that the next time we'd see these halls would probably be our 10th high school reunion, when we'd still be checkers at Jewel and waitresses at Wag's but would borrow fur coats, rent a limo and a man, and talk about our success.

What would we have to remember about those long-gone days?

"Hey, Tricia! Remember when I had my wisdom teeth out and ate the cafeteria's Jello for two weeks?"

"Well, what about that time Kim got a *really* bad perm?"

"Yeah! Yeah!"...excited with the glowing memory of it all..."How about when Missy *fainted* in Econ!"...(laughter erupts of out sheer boredom). Later that night the alumni go home to husband, boyfriend, or in most cases, Mom and Dad (Hey, why move out?) and moan about what failures we are and were.

But not us. We have a plan.

Tricia, Kim, Missy, and I had discussed many prank possibilities.

"Let's graduate naked," said Kim, obviously the thinnest of our group. We suspected she only wanted to show her college boyfriend a little bit of thigh (and a lot of everything else), but the rest of us couldn't picture receiving our diplomas from the Bishop and opening our gowns to reveal cellulite and the hair we never shaved above the knee-cap.

"Thank you, God," the Bishop would say, "for giving me this evidence of the validity of my choice in life. I *love* celibacy!"

"Let's replace the choir cassette with the theme from *Star Trek*," said Tricia. It had possibilities. How fitting for the class to walk down the cathedral's vast aisle, expecting to hear *Pomp and Circumstance*, and instead hearing, "Space...the final frontier...." Then again, irony was lost on a great many of our classmates.

Besides, how would we get in the cathedral? Where was the sound system located? What if it was in use on Friday nights for "Club Sabbatical," when the priests got together and danced to Madonna?

It was Missy who suggested we kidnap Jesus.

Assuming that you're familiar with the guy, and remembering that we were in a Catholic school, you must realize how prominent a feature the Big J was in every classroom and hallway. His picture was above the clock in each room, miniature statues were on the sisters' desks, a full-sized mural was in the gym (next to the trophy case), and most important, a life-sized statue stood guard at the entrance to the chapel. We always thought he looked a little like Ronald McDonald out there, urging us into church, where over five-billion have been served.

Numerous pranks had already been pulled on the guy, such as the placing of gum in his open palm or the painting of his exposed toenails, but kidnapping was new.

Phase One was to get ourselves alone in the school after closing. Luckily, the four of us were on the school paper, and whenever an issue was due to the printer, we often stayed until 8 o'clock at night finishing it. We were a recognized presence in the darkened hallways when nuns would leave the adjoining convent in their nighties to walk, check for boys, or snoop into unlocked lockers.

Obviously we could stick around tonight without getting into trouble. There wasn't paper to work on, but we could say we were doing end-of-the-year cleaning in the journalism room. However, if we were seen, it would all be over.

And so, after the final bell rang at 3 that afternoon,

(continued)

our group began vigorously cleaning the classroom. At 3:30, we locked ourselves into the moderator's inner office and began vigorously hiding. Tricia said we would be more effective that way.

"You never saw Mr. Spock *cleaning* before invading a Klingon death ship, did you?"

Kim began to pass our planned five hours of captivity by calling Keith at Southern Illinois University from the office phone. We were, of course, at considerable distance from SIU, but we'd be well into summer vacation and college acceptance letters before the school would get the bill, so we indulged her.

I began digging through boxes, shelves, and desk drawers, looking for things to sell to pay my way through higher education. I'd accumulated several of Shakespeare's works when Missy and Tricia accomplished their goal of the past four years--to break into the locked file cabinet of our moderator's *real* thoughts!

Our journalism teacher wasn't a num. She was insane. Freshman year, when the four of us met and became friends, Ms.-- was basically normal, except for her hair. Sophomore year, she divorced and began buying clothes with the child support payments. Every one of the new outfits looked exactly the same. Junior year, when Kim met Keith, Missy and I got jobs, and Tricia was still Tricia, Ms.-- flunked an entire American Lit class for being late. By senior year, the woman went crackers. She ate constantly, ballooning her weight and giving her an excuse to do more shopping. Her hair got more and more..well, just more and more each day.

She fired the editor-in-chief of the newspaper and gave me the job because I "looked like a clean girl." She hated Tricia but couldn't fire her because Tricia's mother was on the church board and could have her excommunicated. She thought Missy was quiet and Kim was brain dead. Within two months I had her hating me, which wasn't too bad, because I didn't feel guilty about stealing her lunch money anymore.

Now we were on the threshold of reading her innermost thoughts about the girls in her English and journalism classes.

"Here," said Missy, "It's the old editor's file! Chrissie was fired because I just 'can't stand that girl. She thinks she's perfect. Mommy and Daddy bought that damn car! As far as I'm concerned, she can work at McDonald's the rest of her life!'"

Ms.-- by the way, worked part-time at the Pizza Hut across the street from Chrissie's McDonald's. She also lived in a glass house with a gravel driveway.

"Ah...my file!" smiled Tricia, looking at each one of us (except Kim, who was in the midst of mush on the phone) to extend the dramatic pause. "'Tricia appears to be an intelligent, sensitive, and independent girl,'" she began reading, "'but,'" and she paused again, "'she's weird.'"

We laughed a little louder than people hiding in an office and breaking into private files should have.

After three-and-a-half hours of snooping, spying, and pledging our eternal love to Keith (and heartily gagging after), we were ready for Phase Two of Mission Immaculate--nabbing Jesus.

"Should we pray or something?" asked Kim when we had You-Know-Who in our arms outside the chapel.

"I'm not sure," I said. "Is there some sort of blessing/confession for sacrilege in the name of school spirit?"

Never mind. We started walking down the hallway to the stairs outside, Jesus kind of dragging his feet behind us.

"This is just like that *Footprints* slide show we watched on retreat," said Missy, ever the meditative one.

Suddenly we were face-to-face with Sister Anna Maria Anita, the Spanish teacher who lapsed into French every so often.

"*Hola!*" she shouted, being deaf.

"*Que pasa hombre?*" said Tricia.

"*Grey Poupon,*" said Sister Anna Maria Anita in a beautiful French accent. "Now girls," she continued, "you know the rules. No boys in the school. Perhaps this man is one of your boyfriends," she squinted, being blind as well, "but for heaven's sake girls, he's got a full beard! Why don't you date a freshman? It would be such a boost to his ego!" With that she walked away.

"Date a freshman?" gasped Kim.

We, too, were shocked.

We slowly dragged Our Lord down the stairs, discussing the meaning of life on the way down.

"You really think Morticia could beat up Lily Munster?" asked Missy. "She walked awful slow in that dress."

"Now, what if the husbands got involved?" said Tricia. "Do you honestly think Gomez could whip Herman's butt?"

"And do you think Morticia's kid, Wednesday, is related to Lady Tuesday on the *Mister Rogers Show*?" I asked.

"God, is Keith a good kisser...," concluded Kim from some distant planet.

Jesus was just outside the journalism room when we realized he wouldn't be comfortable in there, implicating us and everything, so we began that good old newspaper trauma trick--brainstorming. Where to put him? The locker room showers, soap in hand...the hallway, his outstretched arm holding a mop...the laundry room, folding, ummm...nun underwear? It was Kim, momentarily snapping out of the clutches of Keith, who found the perfect place.

Mass was canceled the next morning; softball practice too.

(continued)

Put Me In Coach, I'm Ready To Play, continued

Goofiness seemed to take over the school. The Dean was in a tizzy, the principal in a hissy, and the nurse in the halls, advising all of us not to get pregnant this summer. Sister Anna Maria Anita accused Ms.--of "educational uncredibility" and took over English classes for the day, teaching everyone to sing, *Feliz Cumpleanos Frere Jacques.*

That was the night we'll talk about at every future meeting, whether it be a reunion or bagging one another's groceries. That was the day that Jesus stole first base.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

NOVEMBER 27TH, 1989. 10:33 PM

You made me cry,
you little boy.
You held my hand
and stole my heart.

It's a shame
that those black glasses of yours
couldn't clear
your clouded vision.

It's a shame
that it took THIS
for me to realize
that my rose-colored glasses
don't fit
in our black and white world.

But I've taken them off...
and see you
for who you are:
you little boy.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

TO DAD

I realize I have given you headaches by being a scholastic sloth in a family where academics are everything. I am not the mathematician you are, couldn't balance a chemical equation, even with instruction, and am probably the first male Loewe in four generations who couldn't get through engineering school if he won the lottery and bribed all his professors. In some ways, we are very dissimilar people.

Your mustache stares back at me from the mirror. My body sprouts your hair. I talk like you and share the same gestures and booming bass voice. Our ethics correspond like DNA. In some ways, we are very similar men.

We are very alike and very different. We never agree on anything because that's our nature. We fight and bitch and argue that the other one doesn't know anything or can't see the nose on his face, but Lord help the outsider who has the audacity to raise his voice at one of us while the other is in earshot.

When I was in eighth grade and you got a phone call from an irate parent accusing me of gluing a box of fish food to his antique desk, you defended me merely because I said I was innocent. You had no reason to believe me, and most fathers wouldn't have. Defying the two kids and four parents who called me a liar, you defended me. How far wrong can a kid go with a role model like that?

You don't know this, but your feelings are betrayed by your eyes. I first noticed them at a camporee when I was fourteen. I sat there staring at the three first-place ribbons I had won. The two leaders were itchin' and scratchin' about the troop finally getting its act together to win, and you politely stood there, back straight, chest full, your eyes saying, "you dumb schmucks, my son won those ribbons." They saw your eyes and knew exactly what you were thinking. Their eyes never again strayed above your collar bone. I was the only boy whose father was proud of him and the only son who didn't feel worthy.

I do love you, but can't say it. I could hug you, but I don't. If you ever doubt my faith in you, look in my eyes, watch me strut, back straight, chest out, and know that the flair and the resolve that once earned me the nickname of Genghis Khan is inherited.

§§§§§

Joey McGrath

A SON'S LOVE

My father's death was a most horrifying experience. When most people die, they die quickly. Not my father. His death lasted a lifetime until he finally died.

All during my father's life, he suffered from an unexplainable illness. He would have attacks that would render him in a comatose state for hours at a time. His breathing would stop and his heartbeat would slow down to an almost undetectable rate. All color would vanish from his flesh and leave him with an ashen gray skin color. His body temperature would drop until he felt deathly cold. But as quickly as these attacks came, they left just as quickly. Father would awaken from his death sleep not even knowing it had ever happened.

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Of all the physicians that diagnosed my father, not one could find a reason or a cure. He simply lived with the attacks. When I was a young boy, about 13, he suffered from the attacks once every other month. As years passed, his attacks progressively got worse. By the time I had reached the age of 20, and my father 53, he had an attack every other day. Plus, the duration of the attacks lengthened to an all-day experience.

The attacks never changed his attitude toward life. He never let the attacks worry him because he told me once that worrying would not solve his problem. He tried to keep up with family matters, but his attacks hindered him too much.

A year later, the devastating day arrived for me and mother. And father. My father had had an attack and had not awakened in over thirty-six hours. My mother called our family doctor, Dr. Frederick Morissey, to come over and see what he could do.

Dr. Morissey arrived at our home a few hours later. My mother greeted him, then showed him into the bedroom. She closed the door behind her, leaving me to stand in the dark, empty hall. No sound came from the room. Twenty minutes passed.

Dr. Morissey opened the door and stepped into the hall. He closed the door behind him. Before he closed the door, a brief glimpse of my mother crying entered my field of vision.

"I suppose you know what has happened?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you positively sure he's dead?"

"Yes. The entire time I was in there I didn't hear a single heartbeat. No pulse. Nothing. He is, without a doubt, dead."

I released a breath that was long overdue to be expelled. He continued.

"Will your mother be all right? I can give her a tranquilizer if necessary."

"No. I'll look after her."

He nodded. He patted me on the right shoulder, then I entered the bedroom to try and console my mother. That day was April 16th, 1949.

***

The funeral was three days later. Mother believed in the old-fashioned methods of burial. Father was not processed for burial. The casket was made from beautifully polished walnut.

The funeral was over and my mother was standing next to the local pastor, Fr. Davies. I was watching the groundskeepers who were filling in the grave. Fr. Davies was doing his best to console my mother.

I walked near the first worker and watched him fill the grave with dirt. In a matter of fifteen minutes, the hole was filled. The two workers were now leveling the dirt with rakes getting it ready to lay down sod.

The worker farthest from me stopped abruptly. The worker near me kept raking for a minute, then he also stopped. They looked at each other with a startled look across their faces. I looked at them questioningly and approached the grave. I was about to speak when I heard it also.

Thump.

My blood ran an icy current through my chest.

Thump.

Muffled to almost nonexistence but still I heard it. I dropped to my knees and put my ear to the ground. Like a howling wind through distant trees I heard my father screaming inside his early grave.

Thump. Thump.

His fists were beating the sides of the coffin. I looked at the workers who stood horrified.

"Jesus Christ! Dig him out!" I yelled.

They dropped their rakes and ran for the work cart a few plots over. I didn't wait. I started clawing dirt away with my bare hands. Looking over my shoulder I saw Fr. Davies keeping mymother calm and back away from the grave.

I stopped and listened.

Critch-critch.

He was trying to scratch his way out, not knowing we were trying to answer his cries.

The two workers returned with shovels and immediately started to dig at the soft dirt. They were digging in a frenzy paying no attention to where they were tossing the dirt.

The screaming continued.

The workers were trying to dig faster, but they only tired themselves faster. By then, they had about another four feet to dig before they reached the casket. The screaming and scratching grew louder as the workers narrowed the barrier of soil.

It took another twenty minutes before one of the workers tapped the lid of the coffin with his shovel. A Few minutes later, the entire top of the casket had been uncovered. Even though my father must have heard us working above him, his screaming and scratchings had not stopped. One of the workers looked to me for further instructions.

"Bust the locks," I demanded.

The workers then proceeded to beat upon the locks with the edges of the spades. the first lock broke. A few minutes later, the second broke. The third. Then finally the fourth lock broke. They lifted the lid open and revealed the insane creature that was once my father.

My father sat upright in his casket and continued to claw at an imaginary lid. He cocked his head back and began to howl madly. I noticed that his hands and fingers were a bloody mess from the continuous clawing and scratching at the coffin lid. Splinters of wood stood out from his bloody, shredded fingertips. He had clawed at his

(continued)

own face while in the coffin and it now had long, deep scratches running like gory furrows along the length of it. In the process of clawing his face, he had scratched out his right eye. A clear fluid ran down his right cheek to the corner of his open, screaming mouth.

Fr. Davies called me out of my terrified state.

"Thomas! Thomas, come quickly!" he shouted from behind me.

I turned to see Fr. Davies kneeling beside my mother, who was lying on the ground.

Forgetting my father, I ran to my unconscious mother. As I approached, I noticed she looked extremely pale. Fr. Davies was gently rubbing her left wrist when I knelt down beside her. After a few minutes of rubbing my mother's wrist, Fr. Davies stopped and felt her wrist for a pulse. A few moments later, he looked into my gaze and by the expression on his face, I knew what he was about to say.

"I'm sorry, Thomas. I don't know what to say." He stopped and swallowed hard. "I don't know what to say." He was on the verge of tears.

I, however, burst into tears. Great racking sobs shook my body. She was dead. Gone from this world to leave me with a raving madman. For a second, while I was crying, I actually felt envious. Envious that she did not have to deal with this situation. I pushed back the tears and inhaled deeply. I got up and told Fr. Davies: "I'll be right back."

"I understand," he said as he looked at my howling father.

I walked over to my father. He wasn't sitting in his coffin any more. He had stripped off his clothing and was standing nude in his casket. The workers had backed off a few paces and stood awestruck. One thing had not changed, though. He was still screaming as loudly as possible. His screaming seemed to strike a raw nerve in my body. The scream had turned hoarse from the continued strain on his throat. Every muscle on his body was tensed. His mouth formed a perfect "O" as a line of spittle slowly descended from his bottom lip. Trickles of blood ran from his right, empty eye socket.

This is what I was left with. How was I to care for a screaming lunatic. Was I to take care of him myself or was I to send him to a psychiatric clinic? I had to take care of him. It was my duty. I owed him this much. I stood there in front of him. Thinking.

While I stood there, something even more horrible happened. Something even worse than burying my father alive.

I had my first attack.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

THE ROOMMATE

You've become programmed
like a computer
that echoes my faults
and how badly I've mismanaged things.
And all the obligations
of a partnership
have fallen on me.
You rustle in your bed
like a tied, deserted lamb
or cry moans of memories
as you garden the window box
filled with dead flowers,
keeping me awake all night
with your singing anthems of
dead love between tears.
I've been hoping one thing
I hope you fall in love
again as long as I'm here.
But I pray I could fall
in love and lose
so I could keep you awake
all night and blame you
for neglected laundry and
a half starved cat.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

WHY DON'T I JUST CALL THE LANDLORD?

Have you ever tried to study while some jerk in the apartment below is playing Nintendo? Nintendo, a game devised by idiots to be played by idiots. I'm sure the idiots whose brainchild Nintendo is are laughing maniacally all the way to the bank.

There is a certain insistence about the sound made by an electronic television game that fiendishly penetrates the brain, causing one's mind to record nothing but "beep, beep," or "toot, toot." Neither of these words actually describes the sound. It's a sort of combination of the two, sort of a "teep, teep," or "boot, boot." Combine this irritating noise with the sound of a very nasal rendition of a popular country-western ballad, and the crying of two children, and you have a vague idea of what I listen to in the evenings when I should be studying.

Why are the children crying? Because they want to play Nintendo, but the grownups won't let them. Why won't the grownups let them play? Because the grownups are playing, that's why!

I hate living in an apartment.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

COMPANION

I sit quiet and alone,
pencil in hand,
canvas in front of me,
I set up a frame,
for my ideas to be built upon,
I start soft curving lines,
along with some hard edges,
soon the canvas comes alive,
with what I've just created,
I sit quiet and alone no more.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

FLATTERY

I purchased her for a dollar down and a dollar a week from a man who couldn't get the dealer to take her as a trade-in. I put a muffler and tires on her to make her road safe and drove to my girlfriend's house. She declared, "This car isn't going to get you anywhere!" and Flattery was christened.

First the hood flew off and broke the windshield. We wired the hood back on and Flattery kept running. When I was on vacation my cousin wrecked my car. Her insurance company gave me four hundred dollars and let me keep the car. I was money ahead, and Flattery kept running.

My Junior year in high school, I discovered the couch-like front seat was more fun when I wasn't driving. More than Flattery was running then! Later some pranksters yanked the ignition wiring. I put the wiring back together and Flattery didn't sound happy, but she was running! I pulled the valve covers and found the noisemaker--twenty ball bearings. Afterward, Flattery ran better than ever.

When I was eighteen, I sold my Malibu to a friend for two-hundred bucks. Five years later, Flattery is still running. My father liked the car because I made more money on it than I paid for her and gas. I will always remember her because, not only did Flattery get me everywhere, she also brought me back again.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

MAKING THE SOCIAL ROUNDS

Making the social rounds
With my tail tucked between my legs,
I long to be like Eeyore
And let the damn thing fall off.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

I ONLY SOUGHT TO BE YOUR FRIEND

I only sought to be your friend.
Not your hero, champion, or magic man.
You needed a friend,
I needed to learn to trust again.
I never dreamed
of riding in on a mustang
to fend off the red troll
or making fireworks explode on May evenings.
I didn't plan a quest,
yet I brought you the Eagle Medallion.
I had no intention
of allowing you to see your future.
I wished only to lighten your past
so that I might see you smile,
and perhaps laugh once or twice.
Now you know laughter,
and shall enjoy it,
as long as you have
the lion of fame and resolve
as your champion
I will remain.
I ask for your love
and offer my best,
and my trust
as your hero,
and champion,
and magic man.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

FRIENDS

Some "friends" are as
Unpredictable as the ocean's waves.
But "true friends" are as
Reliable as its tides.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

I KNOW PEOPLE

I know people
Have got it worse--
But they've
Got it better, too.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

LIFE AND LOVE

Life's field of holds,
fall in, climb out.
Love is a goal.
Fall in, climb out!
Burns our souls
over here and there about.
Life's field of holes
fall in, climb out.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

FROM A MODERN DAY ROMEO

If I could write a poem to you,
It wouldn't say, "I love you true."
It wouldn't say, "I miss you, too."
It wouldn't speak of rendezvous.
The essence would be, "Come on, let's screw."

§§§§§

Matthew R. Horn

OPENING NIGHT

The sensation
The thrill
Any moment now you'll step out.
Your lines are memorized
Your places are known
Still you feel like you forgot
Something,
Like staying in bed.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

UNDER WRAPS

I finished sipping tea
in the dressing room
watched myself
in black-laced underwear
from six directions
sipping tea as grandly
as a pearl-necked matron,
left the white cup
quite empty
stood there
digging my red-painted toenails
into the thick beige carpet
examining myself
from six sides
feeling, all at once,
disgust, delight, amazement,
for what I am, have been,
sadly aware
that thoughts don't share
as easily as reflections
knowing
the knowing couldn't show
in any of the six mirrors.

§§§§§

James Wolverton

MOON LIGHT

Moon light,
leaving the tree outline
silhouette dancing on my wall.
Restless,
What a crazy life,
3-D reality,
Over flows the ivory cup.
Possible solutions
never sense.
Time to change,
start fresh.
Moon light,
come back,
I'm not finished thinking.

§§§§§

Rosalyn Neitzel

IN THE PITCH OF DARK

In the pitch of dark
I saw myself.
Screaming silently,
Wake up fool
You're not asleep.

§§§§§

Matthew R. Horn

COUPLES

When I go places with friends,
I feel out of place.
Because they are in couples,
And I'm in my own space.

Nobody to hold hands with,
Not one to kiss.
There's no one to turn to,
And that's what I miss.

I feel even more alone,
In cases like that.
Then when I sit down,
With someone to chat.

I hate the feelings inside,
When I'm with couples.
It reminds me of my situation,
And the pain kind of doubles.

§§§§§

Shonda Talerico

SPARK AND FLAME

When the shapely sophomore noticed that the nerdy senior with the frostbitten ear across the aisle was staring at her that cold morning in study hall, that was the moment that my parents knew that they were destined to be together. How two complete opposites could stay together for twenty-two years is a mystery. As different as night and day, a more accurate description would be one of fire. My father is a warm glimmering flame; my mother is a firecracker, an explosion. Their differences are many.

My mother, Sue, is about 5'8", or 6" counting her pencil-thin spiked heels, which she frequently wears. She weighs about 130 pounds, and most of the time, she is covered with black leather, studs, junk jewelry, and anything pertaining to Harley-Davidson. Her hair is as loud as she is--bright red.

My father, Mike, has thinning black hair, and is about as tall as his wife, although she sometimes towers over him wearing her stiletto heels. He has the Bert-of-*Sesame-Street* eyebrows that grow in a straight line across his forehead and a Cheech Marin mustache. Because his shoulders are rounded, his spine protrudes like dinosaur bones through his thin flannel shirts. On his left forearm is a menacing snake and dagger tattoo, left over from his biker days.

My mom is not your typical mother. She doesn't sit around all day watching soap operas eating bon-bons. She has shingled a roof, driven a tractor in 100-degree-plus heat with oversized headphones strapped to her head, and singlehandedly dug all of the holes for our fenceposts on our ten acre yard--all in a string bikini. Femininity is not a dominating quality in my mother, who has to bleach her hands to get them clean, and whose heels have more cracks in them than a parched patch of land.

She's the only parent I know who has won prizes in hot legs contests--beating out women twenty years her junior who strip in earnest to beat her. She attended a Motley Crue concert with me a few years ago, and instead of stuffing earplugs into her ears and complaining about being there, she enjoyed it, standing up on the seat to get a better look and asking me what songs they were playing. She even raised her fist in response to "Shout at the Devil," one of the Crue's "rock anthems."

She likes to read magazines, but not the normal motherly magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. *Easyrider* and *Harley Women* are more to her liking, chock full of bitches, boobs and bikes.

On the other hand, my father is the much quieter parent. A full-blooded Italian, he's the kind who trains his children like soldiers and doesn't get too involved in family matters--except when it comes to disciplining his two daughters. Then he makes his wrath known, with classic punishments such as "no phone," or "no going anywhere for the week/the weekend/this month/two months/until I say so/until you've learned your lesson."

Every weekend for as long as I can remember he planted himself in front of the TV and flipped on the game. A beer in one hand, a seven-course snack spread out in front of him like King Henry, and he was content. He will not move from the screen or make a sound until something exciting happens during the Sox/Bulls/Bears game, like the first home run/basket/touchdown. Then he attempts to cheer, bellowing like a moose, and usually loses his voice for a few days.

He doesn't walk, he shuffles along like a slug, a noisy slug scuffling his slippers. Our floor has a permanent path to the kitchen sunk into the floor. Late at night, I would hear his dragging walk, sounding like a special effect from an old, cheap, horror movie. Just when it sounds like the ghoul is going to get you, the dim refrigerator bulb streams across his bony body--Dad's hungry again. His stomach is like the Black Hole--it never fills up. An hour after dinner, he'll shuffle into the kitchen and make himself a whole meal. And he doesn't gain a pound.

One of his favorite pastimes is fishing. Many afternoons he positions himself in our creek, knee-deep in useless minnows and carp, while brown water fills his wading boots. Hoping to catch something, he'll stay out all day. When, and if, he does, he always tosses it back.

(continued)

It's just for the thrill, although his female family members can't figure out the point in all of this.

They seem to be total opposites, but there are three things that they do have in common--their love for Harley-Davidsons, each other, and being my parents.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

VERY OFTEN

Very often
I think of that chilly Monday in November
when we stood outside for hours
and watched a giant full moon
pass through the swatches of clouds.
Very often
I think of how much I wanted to
kiss you,
but I couldn't because we are
"just friends."
And very often
I think that if we are "just friends,"
then what were we doing
staring at a full moon
together?

§§§§§

Thomas J. Goode

BLUNDER IN THE BALCONY

The town I grew up in has changed considerably in the last thirty years. There is little traffic. Very few people walk the streets. Most of the stores and cinemas are concentrated into two separate malls within the outskirts of the township. The downtown streets have been rerouted. "Cruising the loop," driving around a centrally-located block, is no longer possible. I do have some memories. I would like to share one with you.

My family lived approximately two miles from the downtown area. All the movie theaters were then downtown. My older brother, sister, and I decided to go to the movies. We walked one city block to the bus stop to wait for the bus. It wasn't a long wait, and soon the bus came. The bus pulled up in front of us and the driver let us in. A ten cent token was required by each of us for the ride. I spent most of the ride reading graffiti on the back of the bus seat in front of me. It wasn't a long ride and soon we were downtown. The bus stopped in front of Grant's store and we got off.

There was a lot of hustling and bustling going on downtown. The sidewalks were full of people walking to their various destinations. Police blew their whistles at intersections, directing the bountiful traffic. It was a short walk to the infamous Rialto Theater where the movie was playing we were to see.

"That will be thirty-five cents," said the lady at the ticket booth. I gave her my dollar and she returned my change. My brother and sister had already purchased their tickets and were handing them to the usher at the door. I caught up with them and handed the man my ticket.

We walked into the Rialto Theater. It is a beautiful place built in the 1920's. It resembled a king's palace. The walls and floors are marble. The ceilings are sculptured and are connected to the floors by tall pillars. Large chandeliers are precariously suspended from the ceilings, or so they seemed. I always hoped they would not fall on my head. Decorative, finely upholstered high back chairs were along the walls. They looked like thrones.

We made our way over to the concession stand. I bought a bag of popcorn for fifteen cents and a cup of orange soda for ten. I forget what the others bought. We followed a crowd to the entrance doors of the main floor.

"There isn't any seats open. We'll have to go up into the balcony," said my brother. So up the stairs we went along with many others who had the same idea. Although there were many people in the balcony, we managed to spy several vacant seats dead center in the first row. Next came a juggling act. I held tight my bag of popcorn with one hand and squeezed firmly my orange soda with the other. We gingerly walked between others already seated and a three-foot-high wall that ran in front of the first row of the balcony. Just as we managed to get to our seats, my foot caught on the leg of a chair. My hand that held the cup of orange soda was thrust forward and down. The orange soda flew out of the cup. It seemed to fall in slow motion. We watched with horror as the soda proceeded to splash off the top of a bald headed man seated directly below on the main floor. He was furious! He looked up menacingly at us. It was a good thing the theater was dark.

"Let's get out of here!" exclaimed my brother. We followed his lead to the rear of the balcony. We seated ourselves in the uppermost seats.

"You dummy!" yelled my brother.

"I tripped!" I replied defensively.

Soon ushers with flashlights came down the main aisle of the balcony. They made their way to the first row and shone their lights where we had just been. Seeing no one there, they left.

"That was a close one!" my sister said. I sighed with relief. The movie was playing and I munched my popcorn. I never forgot what happened.

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

NOTHING LOOKS THE SAME IN THE LIGHT

With desires of the night
working on our side,
we decided to try again
and renew our love that died.

All of our pride was left behind
on that warm summer's night.
We admitted that we needed each other,
and said that we would make it right.

We lost ourselves in passion,
and let all our feeling show.
And the way I felt about you then,
I could never let you go.

But then the sun began to rise
despite my begging it to stay,
and our feelings disappeared like shadows
as soon as the sun shone our way.

We woke up unable to show
that our love was still there
so we went our separate ways,
pretending not to care.

The sun evaporated our love
and carried it out of sight
making us realize
that nothing looks the same in the light.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

THE PARTY

I watched the small digital clock click to 9:00 and yelled for Sam to help me close a cash register. We looked ridiculously posh and important...working in the trendy department store selling sexy Christmas lingerie to older women and timid boyfriends.

A Schlan's associate beamed with sarcastic enthusiasm over the intercom. "Our store is now closed. Thank you for shopping at Schlan's. Our store will reopen at 10:00 tomorrow. Thank you."

Sam came dancing over in her red bolero jacket and black pants. "Let's go to that par-teee!" she sang. Sam was Mexican and Italian. She was perfect. I envied her as much as I adored her. She counted change while I entered the currency into the computer. We finished closing our register in record time and went to drop our money and media bags off at Customer Service.

We said goodbye to all we knew and went to my car. The Matteson-Richton Park area where we worked was not exactly posh and important. It was south of Chicago and shadowed with stories of Drug Lords and Mafia tales.

My car knew the way to Justin's on its own. We got out and were greeted at his apartment door by people I hadn't seen since high school. Everyone was home for the Thanksgiving weekend...and were definitely on their way to regretting it as they downed huge tumblers of beer and schnapps.

Sam looked nervous and uncomfortable. She had come with for the sole purpose of meeting my dashingly handsome best friend, Brandon, who I had promised to set her up with. Who was I kidding? One look and Brandon would be in love.

Justin was in the kitchen mixing drinks. This boy was a real entertainer. Other parties had cover charges at the door and supplied a lonely keg of beer. Justin made daiquiris and margaritas for his guests, charging them nothing but a good time and keys at the door.

I led Sam through the hallway of posters. "love and Rockets," "The Cure," and James Dean smiled down at us as we passed their captivity. Justin regarded us with warm hellos and full glasses. In no time, Sam was mingling as well as I was. We laughed and gossiped and talked and drank.

Brandon appeared at the screen door...and answered my questions by becoming quiet enamored of Sam. They sat on folding chairs in the front room and discussed life and the obnoxious party crashers that had been turned away just as Brandon had arrived.

I kissed Brandon's cheek but was rewarded with his ear. "Meghan, come sit here," he ordered. I laughed and turned around into Justin's shirt.

"Meg!" Justin giggled. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine!" I laughed. I rarely drink and I was gone.

"Do you want some pineapple?" he offered.

"All right."

He went to get a slice for me from his barrel of punch, and I went to sit on his first floor patio. I stood on the cement porch and studied the lights from the complex across the parking lot. What was going on, I wondered. Justin was being so nice. We were like best friends...him and me. He was sooo funny! I anticipated Tuesday and Thursday art class to see and laugh with him. But Andrea, his live-in girlfriend, intimidated me terribly. She gave me looks to kill...did she know something that I didn't?

The sliding door opened and Justin appeared. "There wasn't any pineapple left," he apologized.

"That's okay," I smiled.

Without any foreshadowing, without a clue, without verbal foreplay, I reached my left hand out to

(continued)

touch his right cheek. One million thoughts rambled through my mind, each one chanting in elf-like whispers to my sanity.

"What are you DOing?"

"Is this right?"

"Are you CRAZ-eee?"

"He's your FRIEND!"

But all that my conscious could comprehend was which way to tilt my face. Was it to the left? It must have been the left. Justin pushed my arm out of the way as he grabbed my face with both of his hands and kissed me.

To think of our first kiss today is rather ludicrous. If I had been sober, I might still remember every soppy detail. His hands clamped my face, mine found solace in his hair.

Everything spun. The blue streetlights and my heave emotions. His black shirt. My black shirt. I kissed with the hopeless flair of a move star. He kissed with the insatiable desire of a python.

Reality struck me like a blow in the face and I put my hands on his waist and pushed him backwards. Justin looked at me with momentary shock. I simply stared at him. What? What was that? Had these feelings always been there? Or had they been conceived and born simultaneously thirty seconds ago?

I went inside and he followed. Sam laughed and Brandon applauded with, "About TIME!"

About time? What did he mean, "about time"? Sam was past her curfew. I drove her home and gave her the details...how would I ever face art class on Tuesday again?

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

COLD BLUES

Cold blues
In the empty parking lot
Of an abandoned bar.
Silence now
Where once adult difficulties
Were solved with
Underage drinking.
Time to grow up.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

LOVE YA TILL I'M DEAD

It's easy to admire you from far away
And why not? You're Miss Popularity
I try to talk but love cannot speak
So I just dream of having you with me
I'll tell you what the doctor told me
He doesn't give me long to live
So I figure I may as well go for it
And share all the loving I can give
I want you, but I can only wonder
Once they put me six feet under
I'll love ya till I'm dead
A month or two is all it would take
It won't take you much out of your way
On April the first we could go be wed
And you could be a widow by May
I'm not worth much, but only while I'm here
My insurance policy is quiet high
If you would just be patient and wait till I go
It'll be like winning the lottery when I die
I want what's best; I'd do you no harm
At least not after I buy the farm
I'll love ya till I'm dead
I have to act while I still have time
I'm in a hell of a predicament
We're perfect for each other--I'm going to heaven
And to me you've been heaven sent
So please hear me out while I still have breath
I don't think it's all to selfish
To spend some time with a lonely guy
And give him his final dying wish
I'll love ya till I'm dead
We both know what lies ahead.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

SHE MADE HER APPEARANCE

She made her appearance
Like a beautiful little starlet
With a purse full of talent
While we, the nobodies,
Simply showed up.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

JEALOUSY

I watched his eyes
turn to her
and pitied myself
for losing him.

My jealousy took flight.
Although she had been my friend,
I hated her
with a passion.

I shunned them both
and stood apart to watch them flirt
and cried alone with frustration
for losing him & for losing her
to each other.

§§§§§

Shonda Talerico

ENVY

Johnson* says
Envy admits
Inferiority
to one of Superiority

so be it

Envy
the Villain in me
will always lurk
twisting and winding
as ivy
on a wall must crawl
Envy in me will grow

*Poet Dr. Samuel Johnson

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

INVISIBLE FAREWELL

The wake was a disappointment
With only a picture of a face to view.
Grief didn't come easy while a photo smiled at me.
I needed to see flesh in its feelingless.
Say farewell to a face devoid of emotions
Touch a chilled foreboding hand.
It would help me accept
non-existence.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

WHEN YOU'RE AWAY

Your secret fingers
stay touching
long after you're gone--
I feel them everywhere,
try not to shiver.
Your secret voice
whispers in the small of my back;
I listen, straining to hear.
I know the words already,
try not to laugh out loud.
I feel like a little girl at Christmas--
can't tell what's in the packages
for Daddy.
If somebody would tickle me
I'd laugh out loud
and, maybe, shiver.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

TIME KILLS

When the moment arrives, it will be too late
Time passes by all too fast
It is impossible to have fun in life
Because the good moments never last
Time is an obstacle that is immovable
It keeps fun and me far apart
Pleasure in life is beyond my grasp
When its conclusion precedes its start
A problem that has no solution
Like a disaster I cannot prevent
Would someone please tell me now
Where all the good times went?

§§§§§

Jerry Janes

DEATH ON THE TOLLWAY
(or freeway, depends how you look at it, Kim)

Oliver--a teenage, male deer
Patty--a teenage, female deer
Bill--a 1977 Pontiac Bonneville Brougham
James and Frank--two fascist-pig good ol' boys with
ammunition, various weapons, alcohol,
memberships in the NRA, and that "sportin' edge"
Greg and Sasha--Two humans growing up in the future

Location: A wooded, secluded area somewhere in nearby

(continued)

Madison, Wisc.

Oliver: Hi Patty.
Patty: Hi Oliver, um, would you care to groom my fur?
Oliver: I'd like that. (He grooms Patty with his tongue.)
Patty: That feels great, Oliver. You know, I really like this whole deer-thing. I remember in a past life that I was human. All my life was filled with was frustration and some occasional situations that I found pleasurable due to social pressures and media propaganda, but then I read philosophy and realized my error and then after that--all my life was filled with not only frustration, but a deeply seeded feeling of inadequacy, leading to my eventual suicide.
Oliver: (Removes his tongue from Patty's underside) Oh wow, Patty. That's too heavy. Don't forget, we're only deer, after all.
Patty: You're right. Sorry. Don't forget my genitals.
Oliver: Oh, I *won't*!

(The two traipse off into a nearby bush to talk. James and Frank enter from the left. Kraftwerk's "TransEurope Express" plays in the background.)

James: I can smell 'em from miles away. It's that funky unbathed smell that spells "deer" to me.
Oliver: (Quietly to Patty) I can smell 'em from miles away. It's that funky out-of-place smell that spells "fool" to me.
Frank: There's a couple. Let's git em!
Patty: ASSHOLES! (Two shots ring out.)

We now go to a very psychedelic time sequence in which the spirits of Oliver and Patty do absolutely nothing other than stay in their respective corpses, but it was time for some good visual effects. Thin Lizzy's "Boys Are Back In Town" plays in the background. Frank and James take the lifeless forms back to their car and strap them on the roof. They begin their victorious trip home.

Oliver: Have you ever done this before?
Patty: Done what?
Oliver: Be dead?
Patty: YES, I just was explaining to you about one of my past life experiences, and you have the gall to question my validity as a mystic!
Oliver: Sorry, I just haven't been dead before.
Bill: You're getting blood on my headlights!
Oliver: (To Patty) What was that? (Patty continues to drain blood.)
Bill: Me. I'm Bill, the car. Hi.
Patty: Let me ask you, Bill, how can you talk?
Bill: How can YOU talk--number one, you're dead. Number two, you're a deer. How else? It's a story. I can do anything. Watch!

(Bill does anything.)

Oliver: That's pretty far out.
Patty: (To Oliver) Shut up. Hey--what's the big deal with our getting shot. I mean, what did we ever do to them?
Bill: Well, I overheard them talking on the way here. Seems there's some sort of overpopulation of deer in these parts, so instead of the government transporting their excess deer to a different sit, they let hunters have their fill. It's a lot cheaper, the humans get out some aggression on worthless animals, and it's a great male-bonding thing.
Oliver: I can relate.
Patty: Well, I can't! If there are so many of us, and this creates a threat to the local environment due to our grazing patterns, and that justifies our population being depleted through gunfire, then I feel that I have the same right to kill off as many humans as I can, and justify the killings with the common knowledge that all environmental problems faced are due to the overpopulation of the human species, and the rise in technology for the support and propagation of that very same cancerous species. (Patty's carcass begins to wiggle free of the ropes.)
Oliver: Hey, how are you doing that? You're dead!
Patty: Like Bill said, it's a story. I can do anything!
Bill: Far out, Babe!
Oliver: Jesus Christ.
James: It sounds like they're slipping. Let's pull off to tighten 'em up. (The car pulls over to the side of the road. The two men get out of the car.)
Patty: (To Oliver) When I say the word, we go!
Frank: Sure enough, let's get more rope. (The two pop the trunk and begin searching for more rope.)
Patty: FUR IS DEAD!!!!!
(Patty breaks free of the ropes and slams the trunk lid down on Frank and James, decapitating the two of them in the process.)
Bill: My, that was clean! Nice job.
Patty: Thanks.
Oliver: (Mumbling in a trance, legs locked in the lotus position) Fur is dead. Fur is dead? Fur is...fur...is...is fur...
Patty: Get yourself together, Comrade. There is much for us to do. We must call to arms all our fallen brothers and sisters in the cause!
Oliver: Save a tree...save a...tree a save?...
Bill: Here, let me help. (Bill helps. Oliver and Patty load the guns, jump into Bill, and ride into the first town they come to. They proceed to slaughter all its citizens. Since they do not perceive human emotion, they feel it to be justified. They ride through the country and employ various dead animals to their cause. They become a movement. Headlines carry word of the human losses, totaling millions within weeks. The movement grows into a highly organized homicidal machine. Oliver and Patty soon need not to do any of the killing themselves. They move into Graceland, headquarters for AJTH,

(continued)

Animals for the Justified Treatment of Humans.

Within time, groups of animals arise that lobby for the ethical treatment of humans. After years of bureaucratic resistance within AJTH, limits are set on the slaughter of humans, now brought to the brink of extinction. Occasionally, the human population rises in number and has to be thinned out to protect the environment from the humans' voracious grazing practices.)

Greg: Hi, Sasha.

Sasha: Hi, Greg. Would you like to groom my hair?

Greg: I'd like that. (He grooms Sasha with his tongue.)

Sasha: That feels great. You know, I really like this whole human-thing. I remember in a past life...

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

A WAKE

I stood above you
and looked down.
At least, the entire time,
I THOUGHT I was standing above...looking down.
Oh, my best friend,
you looked so pale
and insecure.
It had always frightened me
that you had known so much about me
from my dreams and ambitions
to my loves and my hates.
You could predict my actions
before I thought them--
and I knew you just as well.

Now we are strangers.

I went to touch your cheek
but pulled back--
frightened--
because your features were distorted
in a manner that I could not relate to.
You dropped the withered flower that you had been clutching--
the flower that symbolized our friendship--
And looked up at me--with frustration
in your alien eyes.
"I don't know what to do anymore," you told me.
"All we do is fight."
I looked away--ashamed of the truth.
"I know."

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

MEMORIAM

I remember a few years ago I sat down at my desk, ready for another day of Spanish II. I had a few minutes to waste before the tardy bell would ring so I nervously searched through my folders as if I had a purpose. That was the third day of school and I remember being as nervous as I was on the first day. Maybe it was because I still didn't know anyone in the class, but I made a promise to myself that day that I would say something to somebody besides a quick hello.

I thought that the person who sat in front of me seemed to be nice, so I figured that we would be able to become friends easily. His name was Walter Young, which I found out when the teacher called out our names for attendance the day before. Walter seemed real shy and always sat straight ahead in his chair never looking back. He had black hair and brown eyes that seemed to have so much hidden inside of them. The most distinguishing feature on him was his ears. They stuck out just enough to make them noticeable, but not enough to make him look funny.

When there were only about thirty seconds until the tardy bell would ring, I began to wonder where he was. He was usually in the classroom before I got in there. Then another student walked into the classroom.

"Did you guys hear that Walter Young committed suicide?" she asked.

The whole class looked stunned, but there were no tears. I guess nobody else in the class knew him very well either. I slowly looked up at the empty desk in front of me and realized that it would remain that way for the rest of the year.

Finally the teacher walked in and quickly told the class that the rumors about Walter were true--that he did kill himself. Then he proceeded to conduct the class as if nothing had happened. Like it was just an ordinary day. I wanted to talk about it. Find out why Walter committed suicide. I thought that we would learn more from dealing with a suicide than from learning a few Spanish words and pretending that it never happened.

Though the teacher continued to teach the class for the hours, I didn't learn anything new. I just couldn't stop thinking about Walter. That was the first person I ever knew that committed suicide, even though I never really knew him too well. I wondered what was his breaking point. What made him decide that his life wasn't worth living, that he couldn't take it anymore? I guess nobody will ever know for sure, and in a way that scary. I mean, I'm sure that most people have thought of committing suicide at least once and wondered what it would be like to just end it all, at least I know I have. Now what would have happened if at these times just one more problem came into my life? Would I have ended up just like

(continued)

Walter? Would I have found life too difficult to continue? I tried not to think about it.

Then I looked back in my life to the times when I thought of suicide and found it hard to explain to myself why I did think about it. All the reasons I used to have seemed so stupid. but I guess the main reason I thought about it is that I didn't feel wanted at the time. I didn't feel accepted. Even though I had the love of my family, I refused to accept it because I needed more. I needed a friend to tell things that you couldn't tell a parent. I needed someone to go places with on a Friday night. I needed someone to be there when I needed them, and sometimes that was hard to find. I wondered if that's why Walter killed himself. Was he lonely and just looking for a friend? Did he need a shoulder to cry on?

Then my thoughts were interrupted when I overheard someone whisper to his friend, "That was stupid of him to do. He's going to go to hell for killing himself."

I knew that he was talking about Walter, and that last sentence made my heart shiver.

"He's going to go to hell for killing himself." And he said it so bluntly, like he knew it for a fact. So I made a silent prayer to God.

"Why God? Why did you let Walter kill himself? I'm sure that all he wanted was to feel loved, so could you please forgive him for his mistake and take him up to heaven with you. Just hold him in your arms and love him forever."

The school bell rang just as I finished my prayer. I walked to my English class. Then the teacher walked in and conducted class as usual.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

SILENCE

Long after the silence
had settled
over our world
like a fresh snow
I wondered
what had caused
this unwanted abandonment.
I held the phone
in my hand
and studied the buttons
and contemplated the buttons
and contemplated the meaning
behind the arrangement of numbers
AND letters
But I never called.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

THE COMMON HOUSE CAT

Even though it lives under our feet, the great majority of us have ignored the tact that the common house cat is the most intelligent creature on earth. We think of our cats as lazy, lethargic furry carpets who purr and look appealing. We think they are cute playing their little cat games. We are totally taken in by their performance. Let us look carefully at their true behavior.

Sleeping. Every time you see a house cat, it is sleeping. This is a ploy by felines to make us think they require large amounts of sleep. In actuality, cats require only four hours of sleep per day. This they achieve by taking "cat naps" when humans are about. When humans are nowhere in sight, felines spend most of their time reading or playing bridge with other cats. This is evidenced by the fact that humans can never find a book where they left it, and the pages always look like someone has pawed through them. Game playing is evidenced by looking at a deck of cards from a feline household. Corners are torn off, and tears are often found because felines often bid slam with twelve points in their "hands." This causes "cat fights" with their partners.

Another thing people don't notice is that cats never eat their dry food. They turn up their noses and pad off until the keeper of the house is gone. Then they steal back to the food and feed it to the unsuspecting dog. Since most dogs are excessively stupid, they don't notice that, while they are busy chewing on Nine Lives, the cat is making a ham and cheese sandwich with mayo. (Kosher cats eat corned beef with no cheese or pastrami.) Often food that is unaccounted for has been eaten by the cat, especially the last of anything. The last cup of coffee, piece of cake or pie, scoop of ice cream, piece of pizza, and especially lunchmeat, are all favorites of felines. When your mother queries, "Who ate that _____ I was saving for dinner?" no one answers. Humans are not guilty. The cat ate it.

Another common myth about cats is that they hate water. Every time you leave your house, your cat fills your bathtub with warm water and goes for a swim followed by a shower. This is why the drain is always clogged with hair, and there is never any soap left.

Cats also use our cars at night to go to secret meetings. This is why we are always out of gas in the morning. In order to be sure we don't wake up while they're gone, they turn off the alarms on our clocks. This is why we're always late. A new practice might be to lock the cat in the bathroom at night instead of "putting the cat out."

When felines get lonely, they take money from our wallets and purses and go to "cat houses." This is why we always have less money than we think we had.

Cats are sneaky, but the sneakiest things they do

(continued)

happen at the secret meetings. First, the great cat, called the "Catter," springs atop a great column called a "Catterpillar." Then, using his voice, he causes a great barrier to rise between the felines and the outside world. This is known as "Catter-walling." Next, they all raise their voices in a "catcaphony" of sound, wailing the names of humans who have learned of the true nature of the cat. These humans are captured and beaten to death with a cat-o-nine-tails. I am writing this from hiding in order to inform humans of the threat that lives among them. I've become *persona non gato*. If they get me, it will be a catastrophe, because I cannot then warn you of future plots.

In the future, when you are charmed into thinking felines are lazy and stupid, remember that your cat is sleeping in your bed, eating the food you provided, and doing exactly what he wants.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE ALL AROUND ME PEOPLE
PEOPLE I AM STILL ALONE PEOPLE
PEOPLE WITHOUT YOU PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

REINCARNATION

And here I was.
Here I found myself
in this pink and god ballroom
that I have visited so often
in my dreams.
The blonde chanteuse
stepped aside.
And the tenor sax
took center stage in a wailing solo
that pierced the night.

§§§§§

Katrina Brock

LET ME LIVE...

I'm fourteen years old, and I've run away--
just two weeks ago today--
Now they tell me what's inside me's a life--
but it's just a fetus developing in pain and strife.--
A baby conceived in misery--
now again some want to take my choice from me--

It may be selfish, and I'm told it's helpless--
but I hate this thing inside--
for me a reminder of each night I cried.

They say my case is such a shame--
but only a low statistic, they don't see the name--
They all judge and advise me--
yet none stop long enough to see--
it was my father that put this child in me.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

THOUGHTLESS

i thought i had a freind who cared
through all times bad and good
a friend who always shared her heart
in every way she could.

i though i had a friend who knew
what made me laugh or cry.
a friend who was a friend so true
she'd never ask me "why?"

i thought i had a friend who tried
to find some hope in all.
a friend who felt the pain, and cried
when someone else would fall.

i though i had a friend who broke
her heart so one could mend.
a friend like you, who always spike
the words said by a friend.

that's what i get for thinking...

§§§§§

James Wolverton

NOT READY

Doors stand closed,
silent,
Intriguing,
I don't understand the meaning
Must I finish other chapters of my life
before I move on?
Light beckons.
I question the idea,
What is there?
Still afraid, I turn away,
retreat to the beginning.
Sit down, rest awhile,
I'm still not ready.
Try another day,
Sonny Boy.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

OLD REFRAIN

We hear the soft rhythm
of ancient mountains
rolling off
to the horizon
in smooth peaks,
an undulating cadence
as hypnotic as the tide.
We feel the Mesmer's words
trickle in
on the notes of his
saxophone voice--
a command we cannot repeat
but understand well,
the knowing as exciting
as static electricity
over the hairs on our bodies.
We touch briefly
scramble in the darkness
to find the thing we cannot describe,
which may not exist.
We continue predictable motions
swaying to melodies
as though we were elegant:
I wish it were possible.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

SOMETIMES

Sometimes,
When I'm simply thinking,
A burst of energy
And love
Escapes the solitude,
And I move
Slightly
Closer to you.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

CADENCES

We lie still
silent in the shadowed room.
The moon pours ivory light
thick as cream
slowly over our bodies.
The furnace stutters
in the belly of the house;
your breathing warms
tickles my neck
cautiously.
In winter
we wrap ourselves tightly
against late evening's chest
and listen to time
measure itself out.

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

GETTING OLD

As a child
I felt
so lost
unsure
lonely.
As a teen
I felt
afraid
uncertain
changing.
As a young adult
I felt
grown up
uneasy
searching.
As I'm aging
I feel
loving
knowing
content.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

THIS TIME

Off the heavy sighs and sways
of labors weight to swing.
In the state of days and days,
crying the time away,
to keep their hands;
slap, clapping in muse.
Upon this face
of a mortal race
sifting through sands,
trapped in a glass,
to escape a reflection
of the past;
never to win,
never to lose
clocks tock
rocking,
a tic.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

VINDICATION

When the time of reckoning is at hand
I don't know where I'll be
But being in hell would be better
Than having you in heaven with me
Your ripped out my heart, put it on a pan
And cooked it for my dinner
So if loving you is a holy thing
Then I'll admit that I'm a sinner
You dealt out the cards with one up your sleeve
To help the cards that were in your hand
And when you lay that ace upon me
All my dreams skipped away like sand
All the memories are garbage
Now only instincts will get me by
But if it wasn't for you
I wouldn't have to sit alone and wonder why
All I wanted was a smile but I'd be dead
If it were true that looks could kill
And if talk is cheap then you're as genuine
As the sludge on a three-dollar bill
The price to pay is heavy
When you know you've lost the game
If that were true I'd be deep in debt
And you'd be basking in fame
Vindicated or not, I just can't tell
So go to hell

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

THEY TELL ME I SHOULD BE HAPPY

They tell me I should be
Happy
With what I've got,
But the point is,
I'm not.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

A SHOE BOX FULL OF SNAKES

She was attracted to him out of pure jealousy. She knew she was no one--no thoughts, no ideas, not even a personality. She knew he was someone.

He was of average height, build, and beauty. It was the way he twisted his normality into individuality that incensed her. His arms were always full of books, his clothing casual and unique, and his thoughts ever in action through conversations with various types of people. She hated him.

By change she caught the title of a book in his hand one morning. That night she bought the book, read it, and practiced the art of discussing impressions with another. The person she chose to talk to was the clerk at the store after she returned the book. There was no real need for it anymore, although she did write down its title and author on a fresh sheet of notebook paper. The discussion was meaningless as well; simple training.

When, several weeks later, she noticed a shirt similar to his in a local shop, she bought it and discarded a shirt of her won. She followed this procedure for months, integrating his wardrobe into hers, taking account of the changing seasons, checking for details in fabric and color, throwing away the bland fashions of her past.

She continued reading whenever she discovered the titles he carried. the notebook paper list grew to twenty, thirty, forty books.

Her conversations improved slightly. She talked to librarians, teachers, relatives, strangers; always about books. Whenever the talk turned, she could not comprehend, and quit.

A few of the books led to a knowledge of music. While she had initiative of her own, she assumed he read about musicians he admired, and so bought all of the artists' albums, not sure which in particular he owned.

It was after the addition of music to her program that she began to get noticed. Where before there had been a form blending into the wallpaper there was now a person. Someone. An individual, they thought, but wait...doesn't she seem perfect for him? They're so much alike--the clothes, the walk, look at the book she's holding; and that song--isn't it his favorite?

(continued)

They wanted to talk to her, hear her thoughts and ideas. And she talked back, like a wind-up doll--now books, now music, now him.

Of course he was interested. What is better for the ego than an exact replica of oneself to spend time with? Her reading list increased under his direction, her music knowledge grew, and movies, clubs, restaurants, friends, and a social life were added.

Conversations with others were easy now, knowing so many facets of him. Alone, they had only him. Having sex with her was like masturbating--she *was* him.

She began to eat away what little of his personality was left until she was satisfied. His individuality was straightened back into normality. He became bland, crawling through his surroundings with nothing new to offer. She kept him like an ordinary garden snake in a shoebox, while she shed her skins in the sunlights.

They never noticed he was gone; she was someone so special. A few times she vaguely reminded them of another, but who? They couldn't remember.

She was of average height, build, and beauty. Her arms were always full of any combination of the eighty books she kept listed on a torn and yellowed sheet of notebook paper. Her clothing was casual and unique, and thoughts, although stolen, were ever in action through conversations with various types of people. She had a seasoned personality with no evidence of hatred or jealousy present.

He hated her.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

WHAT DO YOU THINK???

You say you want me Red
You say you want me Yellow
You say you want me Orange, Pink or Blue
You say you want me anything but who I am with you
So ask me, ask me what do I think, what do I think
What do I think of you
What could I, would I, should I think of you...
What do you think?

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

SELFLESS

If you're looking for love,
Put pride on the shelf,
For you can't find love
'Til you lose yourself.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

I BELIEVE

I believe
in the Nursery Magic Fairy
and I believe
in fate.
I believe
distance doesn't matter
and
that it's never too late.
I believe
through time you can
conquer your fears
and
let our love grow
to be true,
because I believe
what the Skin Horse says
and I believe in
you.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

FAITH

I've been told
that it never goes away.
It's just that some days it will bother me
and other days it won't.
Today I wake up with a smile
that holds back the tears.

Shoebox falls off the shelf.
Its contents spill out.
Letters.
Ticket stubs.
Photographs.
You catch me and hold me captive
in your emerald gaze.
I am frozen in time.
I sit hypnotized
and stare at your bold expression
but my vision is soon clouded
by the tears I can no longer hold back.

(I figure that this is one of the days
when it will bother me.)

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

INSPIRATION

You look at life
With such cheer.
Friendly smiles given
To strangers who walk by,
Even a smile for me.
I wonder how you do it.
How do you remain so happy?
You must not be living in reality.
Because in reality,
Everything isn't all candy and roses.
So you must be living
In a wonderful world
Created by your soul.
And I was just wondering,
Could you take me there?

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

DISCOVERY

Lying flat
I feel myself sink
into warm soil;
parts of me dissolve;
I am earth
again.
I lose consciousness
evaporate into the cosmic heart
become the Transcendent Thought
apart from
connected to
the All.
Sometimes I know
what death is like;
sometimes I know
everything.

Lying flat
I hear midnight's talons
scratch at the windows--
parts of me cringe;
I am skin
again.
A razor-edged awareness
cuts through me;
fear stings in the wound.
At these times
I know only life;
at these times I know
everything.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

DA-DA ISM

I bumped into you
(Not literally)
And you smiled warmly
and said "hello."

You walked with me to class
and made insignificant smalltalk
(that you initiated)
and smiled
at my wry humor.

Can you hear my heartbeat?
Loud. Fast.
(I feel like Poe.)
Uncontrollable.

"What IS your name?"
my mind screams.
"Another exciting day of class,"
my mouth says.

You stand aside
and let me enter first--
Oh, the modern chivalry!
And I kick myself
For not keeping the conversation alive.

We take our seats
and anonymity returns.
I see you watching me
through the corner of your eye.

You adjust your glasses
and smile smugly
at my blatant stare.
Please speak to me.
I'm so outgoing. So loud.
And I've chosen you
to be the object
of my infatuation.

Why am I so intimidated?

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

WISHFUL THINKING

The glitter on the falling snow
And sparkle in the lights
Can't grant my only Christmas wish...
To be with you tonight.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

ARROGANCE

Arrogance
Proud strutting, chest beating
Arrogance
Not a simple petty
Everyday selfish
Arrogance
This is a great
Arrogance
To be shared
Arrogance
Bombastic
Climb that mountain
You can do anything
Arrogance
Centers around you
Arrogance
Makes the world
Revolve around you

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

MYSELF

I met a stranger who was myself and I ask him, "where are you going?" and he replied he didn't know. He said he had to be going and again I ask, "where?" Then as he walked away he lifted his head and turned and said, "to find you."

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

THE ROSE

Some people view life
as if it were a rose
and one must endure hardships, or the thorns
in order to obtain happiness, or the flower
but if you really wanted to,
couldn't you buy your rose from a flower shop
and ask them to cut the thorns off for you?

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

BOUND TO BE FREE

My burden is that of Atlas
and the bird in my pocket;
bound for now is my soul.

§§§§§

David L. Sullivan

DEPRESSION

Depression
Is such a wasting thing
A wild, gnashing lesion
Devouring mercilessly
As if the human soul
Were a dish *a la carte.*

§§§§§

Melynda Findlay

UNTITLED

Shivering and cold, I cuddle towards my security blanket (I named him "Jeff"). I suppose to anyone else he's not much to look at--a little worn, a little ragged, but he's all mine. His strong arms wrap tightly around me and instantly I am surrounded by his warmth. One day I think to myself that maybe I am taking advantage of my blanket--taking all of his warmth and comfort and not returning any to him. So I asked him, "Do you love me?"

"Why do you ask?" he replied.

"Just wondering."

"Well..."

He never gave me a straight answer, but then again, he never did; I don't know what I was expecting from him. That was the day that I burned my blanket; his indefinite answer gave me a clear picture of exactly what he was thinking. Setting the flame was so easy; I watched him burn. I heard him scream agonizing, painful screams. I just laughed.

All that remains of my blanket now is a few charred memories. I keep them hidden away in a box (I named it "subconscious"). I take Jeff out of subconscious every now and then and I remember the fire. I shiver and I'm cold. I guess it's time to find a new blanket.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

WISHING

I went to this wishing well
and when I was ready
I reached in my pocket
and pulled out a penny
I wished to be free
and do as I pleased
I wished I could cry
without being teased
and I wished for my sister
not to hit me in the head...
Then I wished that maybe
I might have a dime
to drop in instead.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

HE TALKS TO HIMSELF

He talks to himself
Knowing she never listens,
Hoping she'll overhear.
She remains silent,
Knowing he never listens,
Hoping he'll overhear.

§§§§§

Joseph M. Nahas

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

It was the night after Christmas,
and all through the house,
not a creature was stirring,
but the faucet wouldn't stop dripping.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

RETROSPECT

A frosty breath sings through
brown grasses;
they flutter like a lover's heart.
I feel deep sighs again heaving in the earth's chest;
the ride is smooth,
rolling out to the ends of imagination
in a steady rhythm
as predictable as tide.
I hear sad songs again,
a litany of pain:
lost love,
dead love,
love never born;
I ache with the melodies
in the center of me,
in the middle place
which has no voice of its own
but experiences being
in highly compressed time
poised a moment away from catastrophe.
I watch my breath spread in the cold air
and disappear.

§§§§§

Alex Bennett

JUSTICE

Stealthily, the small figure jumped the five foot gap between the rooftops landing on the other side without a sound. The figure looked over the side of the building, down into the streets below, making sure the larger figure hadn't seen or heard him. The man was still walking with a slight hunch slowly through the sparse crowd. The kid's face broke into a smile, the few remaining rays of light shone off his teeth. Then he continued following, creeping across the rooftop ever quietly. The man came to an intersection, then turned right off the main street into a narrow alley--the same size as every other alley in the city. The alley ran alongside the building the kid was on, and again the kid's face broke into a smile. He followed nimbly along the edge of the rooftop keeping an eye more on the man than his way.

The man continued, passing alleyway after alleyway, the kid following by jumping from building to building. Every building was the same except for maybe a few feet in height. The kid had lived here all his life and had grown strong limbs accustomed to jumping from building to building. The man moved closer to the sea and docks and the smell of sea water became more and more intense. This didn't falter either the kid or

(continued)

man; both knew this pathway by heart.

The closer to the sea the man got, the more dense the alley got. Sailors and warriors walked in groups to bars in an already drunken stupor. The warriors usually visited this end of the city when they were off their shift at the battlements surrounding the city, especially on weekends. The sailors were always here after getting off their ships that had been on the water for weeks, sometimes months. This was the biggest port in the twelve lands for the great river Osgoth emptied into the sea. It started in the mountains at Carciathe, flowed through the underground Dwarven cities, across the Sheffold Plains, around the vast Aelmon Forest, then down till it emptied into the Great Sea at Carseth--the city of the sea. Along the way, the four major rivers--Shemd, Zandip, Tiennus, and Argath--joined the Osgoth, along with hundreds of lesser rivers, streams, and brooks. This vast network allowed sea travel to reach almost every end of the Twelve Lands. unfortunately, while at one time it was almost entirely noble and godlike, Carseth was becoming a city that bred thieves, cutthroats, and evil of almost every kind. Most of the wealthy merchants abandoned the city and lived in neighboring towns--but still within Carseth's protection. This part of the city was known for its whorehouses, making it the most desirable attraction for the sailors when they docked. It was into this part that the man walked with the kid right behind.

The sun finally sank totally, leaving the dirty, dank streets into a blessed darkness. Now was the time for the real population of the city, the thieves, muggers, prostitutes, and burglars to make their living. The man quickened his step, trying to get into a more populated area before the complete darkness set in. The kid, however, relaxed and smiled a third time, for he knew where the man was going. The man went on ahead into busy alleys where the brothels stood. The boy did not worry; he did not plan for the man's death until later anyway. The man went into a building, finally pulling back the hood on his brown cloak and smiling after being admitted by the two bouncers and the pimp that controlled the brothel. This was the widest known and most profitable brothel in the city, for it had many many young girls--some under thirteen--that were an irresistible attraction for many older men. The kid watched the entry from the top of the building directly across the street. Then he sat down directly across from the front of the brothel.

Jaret sat back on his haunches watching more men being admitted by the bouncer. They were both imposing figures, each being well over six feet tall, normal for their race--Casak. Both men had massive, muscular bodies, and each held a large mace in their arms. Jaret hated both of them, for he had to live with them. Often, when they weren't watching the door, they used him for entertainment to the waiting guests. Usually they threw him back and forth, often with no clothes on him. he would get back at them, someday, just as he would get back at the man tonight. This wasn't the first night he followed him. He had been doing it for a month , tracking the man from the brothel to his house. he memorized the paths the man took, the times he left, and the best places to attack. The man followed three paths. he took a different one every night. Jaret knew them all, and he knew the one the man would take tonight.

Jaret sat back and watched the stars as they came out one by one. He knew the man would be in there a long time, for he was known to be exceptionally sadistic and took his time with his women. He always paid extra, thus the pimp allowed him these extra desires, even though no woman actually wanted to see the man even for the extra money.

Jaret watched the stars longer, chewing on a stick that he had taken from his pocket. he often did this when he thought, unknowingly keeping his teeth an exceptional white from chewing. he thought of the great tales he heard in taverns when he was able to sneak in. Tales from the different races of men, the elves, dwarves, and halflings that performed great feats or noble deeds in battle. Eathel, son of Eamer, the great king that defeated the Orcish blackfinger clan in the first battle of the Twelve Lands and drove them out of the Sheffold Plains. Jaret wondered who his father was, if it was a great king or hero that he could proudly put after his name. That was a joke, he knew, for his own mother didn't know who it was. She had been the main attraction in this brothel a year before she had him. No, he was Jaret, son of the Twelve Lands. He watched the stars, dreaming of great things--it was his only escape from the streets. That would change tonight, he thought, for it was the beginning of his own book of great deeds.

After a while, he broke his gaze from the stars and glanced at the brothel. Noises of the party inside echoed across the street as more and more people went in. Very few men were turned away. The bottom floor of the brothel was a large bar. The bar alone attracted many to the building, and the night was getting into full swing. Jaret reached under his shirt and grabbed the hilt of the dagger. He pulled it out, sheath and all, till he could see it in the starlight. Then he slid the blade from the brown sheath and gazed at it. It was the type issued to the guard of the city, bearing the city's symbol at the end of the hilt. Jaret watched the reflection of the polished edge of the blade. He then checked the sharpness of the blade by drawing his thumb sideways along the blade. he felt it scratch the skin, almost drawing blood, then stopping before it cut. He sneered. He had been waiting for this chance a long time. Now, with the dagger, the chance presented itself.

Jaret had gotten the dagger two days ago, stealing it

(continued)

from a city guard who had passed out from a night of fun. The guard was aleep, passed out across a table when Jaret took it. He was proud of his accomplishment, for it was the first time that he had actually performed the robbery. Starting when he was six, he had acted as lookout for the older boys in his gang. Once in a while, he was allowed to carry off the loot, but most often he was just used as a watch. The older kids had always done the actual robbery and kept all of the good loot. Now, almost three years later, he was going out on his own. He saw the dagger, took the chance, and succeeded in getting it without anyone knowing. Again he was going out on his own. He hadn't told anyone in his gang about this second robbery he had planned. This man was his. He was the one. he followed hi, he watched him, and he hated this man. Besides, the loot would be all his. Form some reason, he didn't see the loot as being the real motivation behind this. It was basically hatred--or justice. He knew this man--for he was a regular at his mother's brother--usually he was there four times a week. He was a sick, perverted man who loved beating his women until they bled, often leaving them permanently scarred. He always chose the youngest one, beating her with such intensity they then passed out. Although Jaret had no love lost for his mother, or any other person in the whorehouse, he felt he couldn't let this continued. He would end it. Jaret sheathed the dagger and put it back under his shirt, concentrating on his chewstick.

Jaret watched the brothel earnestly now, for the man was due to appear any time. Jaret watched the men go in and out--mostly sailors from the far lands. Tall men from Casok and Shimel, strong men from Toglith, short from Mal Opshel and Norest. He didn't see any from the other two races of men, but he saw several halflings and a few Dwarves. He never saw an Elf, the tall, fair people from the Land's Woods. He always wanted to see an Elf, and even more so to meet one, but he never had. It was his greatest wish to meet one and live in one of their great forest cities.

People kept going in and out, but Jaret paid them no notice. Finally, he sat up and watched intently. He recognized one figure. The man walked out, looked both ways, then hurried across the street into the alley next to the building. Jaret took the stick out of his mouth and threw it down, then turned to follow the man. He sneered, for tonight was the night--everything was perfect. Jaret followed the man the same way he had before, staying back in the shadows of the roof and moving silently. All was perfect. The man did not notice he was being followed, and the moon was not out, so the only light was the stars. That suited Jaret, for he basically lived by the night and could see by the stars. Jaret was as nocturnal as any bat, and it seemed to many that he had the Elven gift of night sight. Jaret didn't but he did see exceptionally well in deep night. That was his greatest advantage over the man.

The man walked quickly now, passing building after building. Jaret followed as before, leaping from rooftop to rooftop with the greatest ease, landing silently as ever. Finally, the man came to the main street and crossed into the alley beyond. But now Jaret didn't follow. Instead he turned right and scampered across the roof. He got to the other side, then followed the wall until he found what he was looking for. He bent down and picked up a coiled rope that he borrowed from the gang's supplies and tied it around a stake he had pounded into the roof earlier. Then he threw the rope over the side and followed, climbing down the rope as quickly and quietly as he could into the alley below. It was in this alley that Jaret planned his ambush. He located this spot when he followed the man before. On this night, the man walked a path that continued zigzagging the main street. He could pass up the main street and go into an alley, then take that to the first intersection and turn right. Then, at the next alley, the man turned back towards the main street. He would cross it and go into the alley beyond, then make another U-turn back to the street. Jaret hid the dangling rope in a crevice made by the gutter of the building. Satisfied that the rope was hidden well enough, Jaret walked to the middle of the alley. On the building on the left side, there was a small, three step stairway that was parallel to the street and led to the building's cellar. No light was in this part of the alley, making it almost impossible to see more than ten feet in front. At the end, however, light from the street lamps filtered in, silhouetting all those that passed--or walked into--the alley. Jaret stood on the bottom step, watching the main street. Jaret was completely hidden from view since only the top of his head could be seen over the stairway and the blanket of darkness covered this up.

Now, Jaret just watched and waited. It was time to see if he was right--if this was the path the man chose. Jaret had no doubt--he was sure of himself. He calmly drew the dagger from its sheath and waited. He had seen this moment before, but he wasn't actually in it. He had been lookout as his gang preyed their victims. He knew what it was like to wait and it didn't bother him any more. He never liked working for the gang, they always attacked helpless easy prey. Many of these people were old, weak, or just drunk and they never fought back. They always seemed to be paralyzed by their fear--always unable to do anything about it. Jaret never felt a sense of honor--as if there was in thieving, or satisfaction. But he did need to survive, so he contained his feelings, and did what he was told. He always felt pity though. He pitied those poor people that couldn't act for themselves, couldn't defend themselves. Watching these people, Jaret made up his mind long ago that he would never be weak like them. He would not feel any fear, he would just see that he

(continued)

would get out of the situation. He would depend upon himself and only himself. He lost his feeling of fear, and he never felt any. Even now, he felt no fear. He only felt that he thought he was doing right. It was a good thing.

Jaret tried to imagine where the man was. he figured that the man would be moving towards him now. He studied the street carefully now, watching for that familiar figure. Few people passed, mainly groups of drunken sailors and soldiers, loud and unruly. Finally, Jarret could see the figure cautiously approaching. The man was in the middle of the street when Jaret saw him. A flickering light from the torches cast a strange glow around him. Soon, the man's silhouette covered up most o f the light and the he stepped into the alley> Jaret smiled again--with the knowledge of being right--and plastered himself up against the wall of the stairwell.

The sound of the man now pervaded Jaret's senses, the constant shuffling of feet against stone echoed in the alley. Jaret turned the dagger over into an underhand grip, having the bladeguard at his wrist and the blade against his forearm. Jare held it in his right hand, close to his body to shield any reflections of the metal, and peered up. He faced the same direction his victim walked. This way he could surprise him from behind. The shuffling became louder now, and Jaret finally felt some emotion. His heart beat faster in anticipation. All his senses strained for any amount of information about his victim. He smiled. How he loved this feeling. His muscles were all taut, his reflexes coiled. The shuffling got closer and closer until the man finally passed. Jaret sprang.

The man passed about two feet from the stairway and three feet from the other building. Jaret leapt up over the top of the stairwell behind the man, then drove forward, somersaulted underneath the man's cloak, and stopped between his legs. Before the man reacted, Jaret stood up with his face in the small of the man's back and his left arm around the man's left leg. His right arm was curled between the man's legs with the dagger pointed inwards--just above the man's groin. Instantly the man stopped walking, fear running through his veins.

"What do you want?" he asked quickly, his voice cracking as the fear surfaced in his throat.

But Jaret didn't respond. Instead he tried to stab but was stopped. Not by the man; he knew he had him, but Jaret couldn't move his right arm. Granted, at this point, his heart raced, but he felt no fear. Instead, he felt that stupid pity. This was too easy. He had a helpless victim and pity kept him from killing the man. The man must have sensed something, for the initial fear left and he wasn't helpless any longer. The man squeezed his thighs together, effectively trapping Jaret's arm between his legs. At the same time, he reached down and grabbed the end of the hilt that Jaret's hand barely covered. He wrenched it from Jaret's grip, then twisted his body so that he could kick Jaret with his left leg. Jaret, surprised at the man's quickness, could not stop the blow and took the kick in his left side, between his hip and rib cage. He tumbled over and hit the wall opposite the stairwell. the man turned to face him and Jaret looked up. Both saw each other's eyes in the dim light. The man's eyes had a look of recognition and surprise. Jaret's had a look of satisfaction. He felt satisfaction in the fact that the man was not helpless, but instead, challenging.

The man's look changed from surprise to a perverted confidence with an evil smile. "You're the little cur from the whorehouse, aren't you?" he started. "Thought you could kill me, did you? Well it's time I bet you like I did your mother long ago." With that, he reached into his cloak. Still holding the dagger in his left hand, he slowly removed a cat-o-nine-tails with his right.

"I beat a girl tonight to the edge of death, you little bastard. Beating you will fulfill that desire I couldn't get, that special desire of death," he slurred. He had a perverted smile on his face as he snapped the cat-o-nine-tails, the sound echoing in the cramped alley. Jaret said nothing. Instead, he got up and smiled in return as he crouched in this new challenge. He could run, but he didn't want to. Instead, he wanted to destroy this man. He felt his heart beating faster than before, and he felt that euphoria that followed. Patiently, he followed the man's circle, matching him step for step. This is what he wanted, a challenge instead of a victim. To others, this scene might look hopeless, but the Jaret it was even. The man had the advantage of size, strength, and two weapons, but Jaret had the advantage of eight years of fighting and speed. That was all Jaret needed.

jaret waited for the man's first move. They had circled until they were in the center of the alley, parallel to the wall. Bolstered by a false confidence and a perverted desire, the man lunged forward. his attack was clumsy. He overextended himself and put himself off-balance. jaret easily avoided this attack by jumping left towards the wall. the leather straps of the cat-o-nine-tails passed harmlessly over Jaret's head and he reached the wall. Jaret turned and faced his attacker again.

The man recovered, embarrassed at the ease of which a child dodged the attack, and faced Jaret. Rage now seethed through the man's body and he started to attack again, this time snapping the cat-o-nine-tails at Jaret's feet, seeking to entangle him. Again, Jaret avoided the clumsy attack, this time jumping above the snapping straps. And so they went, Jaret just moving around avoiding the attacks, buying time and letting the man's anger encompass him. The man did exactly as Jaret hoped, getting madder and madder. If there was one thing Jaret had learned in all the street fights, it was to not allow his anger to control him, and never ever to underestimate an opponent. The man's clumsy attacks

(continued)

grew even worse, heightened by the fact that he was getting tired. Jaret wasn't even to his second wind yet. Jaret worked his way so that he was against a building with the stairwell directly across and the man right between. Jaret smiled openly. Now was the time to strike back.

The man gave up trying to whip Jaret and instead, moved forward trying to tackle him. Jaret did the one thing the man did not expect. He jumped forward, rolling into a somersault. Jaret timed it perfect, for he rolled under the man's arms and was stopped by the man's cloak on his back, with his feet up between the man's legs. The man stopped and straightened up trying to jump away. He was not quick enough, and Jaret sprung the trap. When the man stood up he spread his legs enough to give Jaret a good target. Jaret kicked both his legs straight up, the limber muscles snapping with amazing strength, and hit the man full in the groin. Instinctively, the man dropped both the cat-o-nine-tails and the dagger, then grabbed his groin with both hands. With a groan, the man sunk to his knees. Jaret moved immediately after the kick, somersaulting backwards and coming up on his feet. Jaret stood in front of the man and let him sink to his knees. Jaret looked at the man straight in the eyes with a look of satisfaction. The man, this time, had a look of intense pain, his mouth opening and closing without uttering a sound. Jaret cocked back his left hand and swung as hard as he could. Jaret's fist smacked the man in the nose, breaking open healing scabs on his knuckles. His punch wasn't hard enough to knock the man out, but it was enough to knock him back into the stairwell. The man landed on his head, putting him into a state of semi-consciousness. Jaret scooped up the dagger, then followed the man into the stairwell. He jumped up, then landed as hard as he could on the man's stomach with both knees. Air rushed from the man's lungs, taking away his breath. The man gasped to fill his lungs, but Jaret saved him the trouble. In one quick motion, he stabbed the man's heart, killing him quickly. Jaret had been taught that method and seen it before, when the older gang members killed someone. The man gasped one last time, groping the air for anything. Then the man died. Jaret stared in a trance. He had never killed a man before, he never knew so much blood could come from one wound. He felt nothing, only a satisfaction and justice. He ended the torture of others with that stab. He felt good about that.

Jaret snapped from the trance, realizing he had to get out of there. He searched the man, not expecting to find anything with the thought that the man spent all his money earlier. To his surprise, he found a money pouch that was still half full. Jaret pulled it off the belt, snapping the leather straps that held it on. Jaret padded down the body. Inside the man's right boot was a dagger. Jaret pulled it out and examined it. To his glee, he found it was richly made, with small writings on the blade. Jaret sheathed it, then pocketing the pipe and money and clutching the dagger, he hopped out of the stairwell and ran to the rope. He left his old dagger and the cat-o-nine-tails behind as well as the body. He climbed the rope, then untied it from the top. He threw the end out far into the alley, then turned and ran the other way. While Jaret saw or heard no one, he still moved as quickly as possible.

Jaret jumped from rooftop to rooftop, running in the clear night with a smile--the first real, happy smile. Jaret felt exhilarated, knowing he had defeated great odds and was unscathed. Now he wasn't sure what feeling was better--before or after the fight. Jaret had his own tale to tell, maybe not now, but sooner or later. He ran with abandon, clutching the dagger in one hand, the other swinging freely. He ran away from the sea, towards the city's largest building. The church could be seen from everywhere in town, and Jaret went there often. He jumped from the last rooftop, standing before the church.

Jaret climbed up the church to his favorite perch--the seventh level. The church was built basically as block on top of the other--just like a pyramid. The bottom block was huge, then the second a little smaller, and so on for twelve tiers, one tier representing each land. Jaret sat on the wall, facing the sea. He came here often, for it was the only place that Jaret felt any true sanctuary. From this level, he could see both the city and sea. Jaret felt safe sitting here, confident, almost majestic.

He set his treasure beside him but without examining it more. Instead, he took out a chewstick and watched the sky. The darkest of night was over, and soon the sun would rise. The bell above, small but magical, rang to signal the changing of the guard. Jaret just sat still, truly happy, gnawing on the stick. By the time the sun rose, Jaret was fast asleep--dreaming of future tales with his name appearing in them all.

§§§§§

Then it hit me.

Wordeater#71

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE 1990

Lawrence's Wordeater entry is put on hold when he's hit with writer's block.

WORDEATER 71 STAFF

Judy Belfield, Alex Bennett, Sue Cherven, Jerry Janes, Bob Loewe, Maria Mellinger, John Stobart

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

POETRY-$5 EACH TO:

Norma Dodge
Sherry Gunderman
Jay J. Kaylin
Maria Mellinger

PROSE-$5 EACH TO:

Alex Bennett
Walter Coffey
Sherry Gunderman
Bob Loewe
Maria Mellinger
Shonda Talerico

COVERS-$20 TO:

Dave Gardner

Manuscripts or cover designs for

WORDEATER 72

must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

April 12, 1990

Manuscripts will not be returned and should be typed.

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wordeater 71

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Jay J. Kaylin

MURGLEFLURGLEFLICKITYTICKITYTAT

I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flicity-tickity-tat
Please look at where you sat
Close this book!
and take a look!
take a look at, where you just sat
Because I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flickity-tickity-tat
and you just sat on my zamp
and you sat on my boo-bamp
and you sat on my kiss-zackle
and now my rickity-brickity-brackle
is all out of wackle

So the next time, before you have sat
don't forget to ask,
and ask about me
to someone you can see
if they know where I might be at
Because I'm the Murgle-flurgle-flickity-tickity-tat.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

ROMP

Little boy looked at me with
little boy eyes twinkling
squeezed tight wrinkling
in delight,
smiled that little boy smile
wide ear to ear--
Little Devil,
I think,
I'm gonna grab you up
carry you off
when your Momma's not lookin.
We'll do Patty-Cakes
say "Georgie-Porgie"
play peek-a-boo
up and down the house
all the livelong day...
It's been a long time
since I had a baby.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

IN WHICH POOH DISCOVERS WHO PRECISELY HE IS

One clear day of a day Winnie-the-Pooh began to think. He thought about thinking and he thinked about thoughting and he sang a little song about thinks and thoughts, which went like this:

It is right and ought,
To think and thought,
To rub my tummy and sigh,
To dream of honey
And places sunny
And who precisely am I?

at which point he stopped his song and thought (or thinked), "Who am I?"

And so Pooh put all thoughts out of his mind (which wasn't hard, being a Bear of Very Little Brain who thought mostly of naps and honey, which were, in fact, hard thoughts to put out of mind when one is a tired and hungry bear such as Pooh, which led his mind to think again, "Who am I?") and went out to ask his friends, "Who am I?"

Under the large beech-tree that was Piglet's home he found his small friend, who was, in fact, a Very Small Animal. "Who am I?" Pooh asked Piglet.

"Well," said Piglet. "*I* am the Grandson of Tresspassers W., and I have a new scarf to keep me warm."

"I see," said Pooh, "but could you possibly tell me, if it's no trouble, Who am *I* ?"

"You're Winnie-the-Pooh," said Piglet, "and you're my friend."

"Hmmm..." Pooh rubbed his left ear as he hummed his Hmmm..., shifting his thoughts to his right ear, and not hearing, he believed, a proper answer to his question.

Several trees later he met his good friend Rabbit. "Hallo, Rabbit," he said. "I wonder if you could tell me Who I am?"

"You're Winnie-the-Pooh," said Rabbit. "Have some honey," he added nervously (or perhaps worriedly for he wondered how Pooh had forgotten to recognize himself and asked "Who am I?").

Winnie-the-Pooh sat down to a delicious pot of honey and never stopped thinking and thoughting throughout the meal. "Who am I?" he thinked. "Who am I?" he thought. And he made up another song as Rabbit hopped home with the empty honey pot. It went like this:

Am I a worker,
A doctor or clerk or
Mailbox attendant
For letters send-ant?

(continued)

In Which Pooh Discovers Who Precisely He Is, continued

Am I a learner,
A page in a book turner,
A reader of poet-ry,
Who, precisely, is me?

And by coincidence, or another large word meaning "strange and unusual happening," Owl flew down to Pooh's side. "Hallo, Pooh," said Owl, a Very Good Learner. "How's things?"

"I wonder if you might tell me," said Pooh, "being a Very Good Learner, and myself a Bear of Very Little Brain, "Who I am?"

"You are a Winniecus-laticus-el-Poohmus," replied Owl, "which, translated, means you are Winnie-the-Pooh."

"Thank you," said Pooh, although he did not understand (but was a Bear of Great Politeness).

Next he happened upon Eeyore, who, when Pooh asked "Who am I?" replied, "You're far better off than I am, I expect. No wonder...being a Pooh Bear."

With this, Winnie-the-Pooh put his head between his paws and thought about thinking until Christopher Robin walked by. "Hallo, Pooh," he said, "do you have a headache?"

"No," answered Pooh. "But a thought has been thinking at me all day, and I can't find an answer for it."

"Sorry, what was the question?" asked Christopher Robin.

"Who am I?" said Pooh.

With this Christopher Robin began to laugh as only a young boy sitting with his bear can, and replied, "Silly Old Bear, you're Winnie-the-Pooh, and I love you!"

"I see," said Pooh, and this time he did see. He was Winnie-the-Pooh, and that's all he needed to be.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

A DRAGON

A dragon who lived in a glen
Was feared by all women and men.
He let out his breath,
And spewed instant death.
The survivors bought him some Sen-Sen.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

THE NUTTONGLUTTON

I am the Nuttonglutton
and I live in your bellybutton
Now there's no need to get mad
and no need to pout
if you want me out
Just shake your belly all about
and shout "sauerkraut, sauerkraut,
get out, out, out,
get out of my bellybutton
you silly old Nuttonglutton."

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

LIKE EDWARD BEAR

Like Edward Bear
bump
bump
bumping
down the stair,
you've taken my heart
and made it a part
of all of the everything
for which you care.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

DODGE-ING NURSERY RHYMES

Hansel and Gretel were put on their mettle
To escape form the wicked witch.
Hans said to Gret,
"Now, don't you sweat,
I know we can fool the old bitch.

*****

Mary and her little lamb
Are well known far and near
When Mary's lamb became a sheep,
She had to learn to shear.

*****

Little Boy Blue and his famous horn
Are beloved of every child
But his parents took his horn away.
It really drove them wild.

*****

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

I OFTEN WRITE ABOUT DAD

I often write about Dad
Because Mom is just like me.
She usually thinks as I do,
Likes doing what I do,
And excels at what I like.
I can't write about her.
Writing about Mom
Is writing about myself.
I was never very good at that.
If I don't write about you, Mom,
Please understand,
It's not because I love you less.
I understand you more.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

FIVE LOUSY POEMS

Five lousy poems are all I got
Out of last night--
He got drunk,
She got laid,
Our host got trouble,
And I got a big nothing
That I stuffed with words.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

ARTIST'S SONG

Art is my music,
for it makes my soul dance,
A soft sweet melody,
of pastel watercolors
draped against the canvas,
the hues blend together softly and delicately.

A sharp industrial strength hard core beta,
I turn it up loudly,
Splashes of neon brights,
and fire engine reds
SHOCK
the canvas,
setting it on fire and
setting my soul to dance.

§§§§§§

Thomas J. Goode

A BROTHER'S TALE

The morning sun shone with all the promise of a beautiful late summer day. My brother and I were up earlier than normal for a Saturday. We had a job to do. A man from the Raven's Club was going to pick us up at eight o'clock and take us to a spot in the country where we would set trap, clay pigeons, for several men who wanted to practice their shooting. My brother was sixteen and I was twelve.

"How much do you think they will pay us for setting trap?" I asked my brother as he gobbled down the last of his breakfast.

"Probably five dollars," he answered.

"That's not bad," I said. "Is that each?"

"Yeah, five dollars each," he stated. Soon our ride pulled up and honked the horn.

"Let's go," said my brother and off we went.

There wasn't much conversation while the man drove us through town and out into the country. Several other men were already there when we arrived at our destination. They seemed to be laughing and joking about something. After we greeted the others, it was time to do some shooting. My brother and I carried boxes of clay pigeons to the pit in the ground that housed the machine which threw the clay dishes far into the air. the pit had a roof over it so we were protected and unseen by the shooters behind us. We climbed in and got settled.

"Ready?" yelled one of themen.

"We're ready," my brother yelled back. He loaded the machine with a clay disk.

"Pull!" said somebody. My brother pressed the button of the machine and sent a disk flying into the air. There was a loud bang and the disk was pulverized.

"Good shot!" someone exclaimed. We kept loading the machine and letting one fly every time someone yelled pull. After about an hour, someone yelled to us that it was break time. We crawled out of the pit. The men were standing behind the back of a pick-up truck. They popped their beer cans open. My brother and I walked slowly toward the river. There was a whole herd of cows grazing by the river's edge. My brother picked up an acorn and threw it hard at the backside of a cow. The startled cow ran into another cow ahead of it. I started throwing acorns too. Before long, all the cows were stampeding themselves off the three-foot-high river bank into the water. It was quite a sight to see so many cows plunge into the river and swim to the other side. All of them did except the last one. It wasn't a cow. It was a bull! He stopped abruptly at the river's edge and turned around to face us.

He was stomping mad. The bull actually lowered his head and started digging at the ground with a front hoof.

(continued)

"Oh-oh!" exclaimed my brother. "Head for the trees!" Behind us was a five-foot in diameter tree. We ran to it with the bull charging close behind. Around the tree we ran for our lives. The bull was trying to horn us. After about five laps around the tree with the bull getting even closer to our tails, my brother screamed to head for the cornfield the next time around. We did. The corn was higher than our heads. We ran about one-hundred yards into the field. The bull didn't follow us into the cornfield. When we thought it was safe, we came out of the cornfield. The bull had left. We headed back to set more trap.

This story is funny to us now, but we were not laughing at the time. This a true story and not a lot of bull.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

GHOST STORIES

It was hot. So verrrry hot. I attributed the heat to it being the last week of July in a southern sector of Pennsylvania. I was nineteen and had been forced to take a "family vacation" to nowhere in particular in a whale of a Winnebago that smelled of moth balls and had NO air conditioning...while civilization as I knew it flourished in the greater Chicagoland area--some 600 miles behind us. What I had to look forward to was visiting Lancaster and watching the Amish drive around in their buggies, touring wax museums in Gettysburg, and the heat. I was sarcastic and I was a brat and I was a whiner and I didn't like the heat. And it was hot...very hot.

The Holstein of a Dalmation pushed me out of the way to angle a better view of panoramic Gettysburg. I gasped at the thought that these avenues of tourist traps had once been the stage for the turning point of the Civil War.

We stopped our "Wonderbus" for an early dinner at an in-town restaurant. My father (the comedian that he is) chortled over the thought of bringing toy guns onto the battlefields at dusk and scaring other sightseers witless as we paraded as specters from the war. I thought of how nice a swimming pool would be.

We finished our dinner and drove down winding roads through battlefields and monuments until we reached "Artillery Ridge Campground." The wooden sign by the side of the freshly tarred road was done from cut wood. Someone had taken a lot of time on that sign...

The trailer that I had fondly dubbed "The Bismarck" pulled off of the road and into a small paved lot. Everyone, including the dog, got out to register at the office. I assumed that it wouldn't take long, and sat in the trailer's doorway and watched children play in the pool that was adjacent to the office. The chlorine was intoxicating. I cynically counted off on my fingers how many days I had left in the traveling sauna and studied the cars that whizzed past our depot on their unknown course to an unknown destination.

The sun had peaked in the sky and was beginning to fall. My patience had worn thin from waiting, and I wondered if it was any cooler in the office.

I opened the door and was hit with a refreshing blast of almost cold air that made me feel like a martyred fool for sitting in the heat for so long. The office was a store as well as a registration spot. There was Civil War memorabilia adorning all four walls. Portraits of Grant. Portraits of Lee. What side had these decorators sympathized with? Above bric-a-brac cannons and Confederate flags were issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Fishing Life*. A huge freezer with glass doors advertised 2% milk on a scribbled page of marker posted rates and expenses.

I turned to see with whom my family was entranced. It was a forty-five-year-old man. He reminded me of a Buddha statue, the way he stood behind the paneled counter and played with the wispy strands of hair on his balding head. He was wearing a navy and gray striped Polo that barely covered his enormous stomach, and when he spoke, he revealed a mouthful of assorted and missing teeth. He frightened me at first, but welcomed my entrance with a hearty, "Hello there!" and I was intrigued by my family's fascination at what he was telling them.

This man was a born storyteller. He could have been a preacher the way he held his audience with a crooked finger and a timely pause to capture his breath. He was telling my family about the ghost sightings that he had heard about over the years in Gettysburg. He relayed them with the passion and excitement of the moment...and for this I leaned in closer.

My parents realized that they had been gawking, and decided to go hook up the trailer to the water and electricity. My brother and I stayed to hear more from this stranger. he professed sanity and honesty, and continued.

"...and these guys...they were from this very campground. They snock onto the battlefields at night--y'see?" We nodded.

"And they wan't drinkin' or anything, because I had helped them out there...and a half hour later they're back and they're all out of breath and pale as anything and I asked 'em what happened and they tol' me."

He paused for effect and we moved closer so as not to miss another word or decided smack of his lips. His long vowel accent started up again with more energy.

(continued)

"See, the one guy's great great grandpa had been killed in the Civil War. Here, at Gettysburg. And they was snooping around the monuments when they heard somebody coming out of the trees. They ducked down behind that Minnesota Monument as bes' they could and watched. And what they saw was SOLDIERS comin' out of those trees and they was carrying canteens and guns and they was all white and glowing! And the one called the one boy by name! It was his grandpa! And the poor kid nearly died right there from fright! And they went runnin' back here and didn't stop and didn't look back--let me tall ya! And they told me their story and it was real genuine, Kid," and he tugged at my brother's sleeve as he made a disbelieving face.

"...and the group of them left that night! Said they'd stay at a hotel in town, they did, and left after they'd paid in full and everything!"

My brother turned to go. "I'm gonna go swimming," he informed us.

"They were drunk," he whispered to me as he left. I smiled at his humor, but stayed to hear all that this man would tell me. He rambled on about lights that still go off on the battlefields at night...marsh lights...where bodies let off gasses that mix with the air and make fluorescent glows to this day--125 years later. he told me about the creek behind the campground where bullets still wash ashore and the cries in the night that even he has heard. I couldn't believe the fabricated history that spewed from this man's mouth. Devil's Den that was only a block down the road where sharpshooters hid between massive rocks and bumped off Union generals who watched from the wooded hill of "Little Big Top." The Gettysburg Cemetery where Lincoln had given the Gettysburg Address that has dazed figures roaming its grounds past sunset. And the eerie feeling that EVERYONE reports after visiting the battlefields. The silence and aura is overwhelming...supposedly. My skepticism was melting away with each story that he told me. The sun had set and the moon had risen when he had to go and I had to rejoin my family. I stepped into the humid heat of the night and turned to thank him as he locked the office door.

"You've chosen a fine night to stay here," he told me. "It's a full moon tonight," he whispered through his dreadful teeth as he motioned to the sky. "Stay awake and sit by the window and I bet you'll see somethin'," he promised.

My eyes widened at his prophecy. He said goodbye and I walked away down the gravel drive to find my trailer. The full moon peeked through leaves in the tall trees that shadowed the walk. I kicked a few pebbles out of my way and began to walk faster.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

LITERATURE

The verbal page
was deocorated with blue
horizontal
lines.
And words
that were difficult
to fathom
belonged
in the margins.
And grades
and futures
were determined
by the mood
of the reader

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

MY TAPES

My tapes
His tapes
Your tapes
Our tapes--
How should I know
Who to love
When there's so much
Music?

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

THOUGHT PROVOKING IMAGE

For every chartreuse cat whisker
in the world,
a luminescent toad shit
lies between zero and infinity.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

THE DISTANT BUZZING OF A FLY

The distant buzzing of a fly
Sounded like a fair maiden's
Mournful cry,
So I silenced it
With my dragon of a flyswatter;
And bid her goodbye.

§§§§§

Jenny Hillenbrand

THE HUE OF THE TREE

The fluorescent lamp light,
on an overhung green limb, in summer,
when there is no wind,
gives the pigment of the branch
the most incredible hue of enchantment.
The world freezes.
and lit it should be in a black and white photograph,
The tree poses.
The glow only scratches the surface of a tree,
deep,
black,
thick,
dense,
branches
touched, only so slightly.
No sunlight could do this.
The sunlight penetrates, disarms, violates,
every nook of the tree.
You are exposed to the gaps of the limbs
No mystery, only beauty in the daylight.
Whereas the man made light,
like man,
creates mystery.
The black penetrates and occupies the tree
as animals do in the day,
consuming it,
So that only this glowing,
radio active,
incandescent,
sterile,
radiant light
pays it any compliment.
You must see it someday.
The hue of the tree.
On some evening stroll, by streetlight.
Notice this phenomena,
How a man made treachery, can enhance nature's beauty,
is beyond me.
But do believe the exquisite beauty of this match,
of man to nature

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

T.V.

Something noticeably stupid or foolish being viewed from an electronic system that transmits transient images of fixed or moving objects together with sound over a wire and is contained in a ridged typically rectangular receptacle with a cover.

§§§§§

Jerry Janes

2:45 am

Laying in bed, music fades...away,. wiping off my face, wiping off my face, wiping off my face. Nose gets drier.

Observe.

The reeds whistle to me, reminiscent of seaweed--waving in the moon-driven vibrations of the water weather at the very bottom of the sea.

The guitar is the hurried timekeeper, running for his master's business, admitting the secondary fancy of God's heartbeat. His heartbeat keeps the time. The time instructs the beat. The beat instructs the drum skins to vibrate from the strokes of the rhythm keeper, the slave.

All other musicians dance and frolic in the security of his captivity.

The music fades, for a new song is approaching, new, for my consideration.

I take a drink of water. I think about.....
.....
.....
.....
.....everything.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

WHEN YOU WAKE UP IN THE MORNING

When you wake up in the morning
I am still asleep, so many time zones away.
You eat breakfast, go to work, take a break,
And I awake.
I begin my day, thinking of you,
Working or reading, busying myself
In the tasks of being without you.
You continue working, have lunch or
A rest, thinking of me,
Busying yourself with being the one who left.
Someone in my evening and your night
We intercept each other's time lines and
Talk for minutes or hours; we're never sure.
Order is restored,
No matter what time of day,
By the simple rewinding of our relationship.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

TO DAWN

To Dawn,
the girl who lost her heart
in the wishing well.
And although she peered
into its blackness
and called out
into its deepness,
she heard only her own voice
echoing
from the depths
telling her
that her heart was gone
and nothing will be the same
again.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

MARCEI

Marcei Baldetti has spices on her cheedk,
Marcei Baldetti has tomatoes on her feet.
Marcei Baldetti has noodles in her nose,
and Marcei Baldetti has macaroni between her toes.
Marcei Baldetti has cheese on her chair,
Marcei Baldetti has meatballs in her hair,
and Marcei Baldetti really doesn't care,
cause Marcei Baldetti likes her spaghetti- -everywhere.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

I HAVE THIS THEORY

I have this theory
That if I don't try to love you,
Then I won't fail, and we will be
Together for many years;
Separate, alone,
Joking about what could be
If it weren't for the
Damn theory.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

MARIA

It's jealousy
Essentially unmitigated
Jealousy
I envy you
You have the craft
You have experience
I envy you
I have the dream
The sheer electric desire
That is necessary
In love
In sex
In poetry
The physiological need
For expression
My words may be nothing
In the end
Trite, trivial or frivolous
Perhaps not
Envy causes me
To study the craft
And cross it with my creativity
Perhaps someday I will be great
And you will be partly responsible
For my success
Because your work created
Unmitigated, insatiable
Jealousy

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

WAITING FOR FREDDY

I met Nikki and Jenny when my sister was in the hospital. I couldn't stand to be alone in the house all the time while my parents were visiting Ann. They always invited me along, but I just couldn't bear to go and see my sister sitting there being proud of herself because she was on one thousand milligrams of something when her roommate was only on seven hundred and fifty and therefore wasn't as sick. I went just the same- sometimes.

I spent most of my time either in school or at my job (which occupied thirty five hours of the week). The rest of the time I spent surrounding myself with as many people as I could. Nikki and Jenny were always there. They needed me as much as I needed them.

On weekends, we would go to the movies, or to play if any of the high schools in the area were doing one. We tried to avoid parties. Nikki and I always had to carry

(continued

Jenny to the car after a party. Most of the time she was only drunk. We had blindfolds for other occasions when she would take one hit too many.

Jenny's father used to send her checks in the mail. He had divorced her mom and moved to California, where he remarried. He was the type of guy who would solve people's problems with plastic. Maybe he thought he was buying her the life she always wanted. Maybe he was.

I only met Jenny's mother once. It was loathe at first sight. I can't blame her much for hating Nikki and me. Whenever we would bring Jen home, her mother would have to drive her back to where the party was the night before to pick up her car. Her mother never did figure out why Jenny's keys kept getting locked in the trunk.

Nikki had different problems. Her stepfather just plain had it in for her. Whatever went wrong was Nikki's fault. Her stepfather hated me too. He told me so. I tried not to be there when he got home from work. If I was, he'd start badgering me about when my "weird" sister was going to get out of the hospital. I only sought him out once--I needed someone to yell at. I think that was the only reason he tolerated me--I fought back.

Nikki and I learned that if we could find somewhere for Jen to drink besides parties, we could keep her away from the drugs. Every Friday night after going somewhere, we would stead a bottle of whiskey from Nikki's stepfather and go out to a tent she had set up in the woods the family owned behind the house. A fifth was too small an amount to be noticed, and he usually couldn't find his way out the door on Friday night, let alone find the tent.

The three of us would zip ourselves up inside, open the bottle and start telling the events of the week. About three in the morning, Nikki's sister would sneak out of the house to the tent, and the three girls would finish the bottle and engage in "girl talk" while I politely pretended to be asleep. I never did like whiskey, but I do have performance ratings on most everybody in my class. No one ever figured out how I always knew who was fucking who--and how well they were doing it!

We had been "camping out" on Friday nights for about two months when I told the girls I was having trouble sleeping because of a dream I kept having over and over. Every night, I would start to feel sick. Then, my sickness would intensify into pain which turned into an awful, itchy, scaly, scratchy, insect-like feeling under my skin. When I looked down, I would see knots moving around under the surface, itching and searing their way across my body. I would start scratching, then ripping and tearing away at my skin, trying to get at the bugs. Then my fingers would start turning scaly and get longer until they formed tendrils that would wriggle and writhe around my bones and intestines, creating icor wherever they touched my body. Festering globs of flesh would drop away, then larger pieces of rot. Soon, the bed would be covered with a puddle of gore and pus with a foul stench. The tendrils wouldn't stop. After finding I had no more body to devour, they would drive themselves through my eyes. Sometimes I woke up. Sometimes I think I passed out and then woke up.

Nikki said it wounded like Freddy Krueger had taken over my dreams. Jenny said it sounded like Freddy didn't have to. I tried to figure out who Freddy Kreuger was. I didn't have anyone in my class named Freddy. I didn't know a Freddy. Why would a Freddy want to take over my dreams? I asked and was rewarded with laughter. Nikki and Jenny vowed that, on the next Friday (not the thirteenth), they would take me to see "A Nightmare on Elm Street."

The next morning, while the girls complained about the cat marching around on their sleeping bags, I tried to figure out if I needed any more "nightmares" in my life. Had it not seemed so important to them, I might not have gone to see the movie. But it was, and I did.

I spent the entire movie munching popcorn and waiting for the scary part. People getting cut open wasn't scary; it was sick--gross, perhaps, but not scary. The plot wasn't scary. The makeup wasn't scary. Where was the scary part?

As we walked out of the theater, I saw girls clutching their boyfriends' arms. I didn't get it. When we got to the car, Jen asked me what I thought of the movie. All I could do was stand there, shrug my shoulders and sheepishly say, "I guess I missed the scary part." No one talked on the way back to Nikki's.

It was a hot night. All the tent flaps were open, and the three of us were lying there in our underwear watching the mosquitoes bounce continuously off the netting. My head was propped up in the corner on the only pillow. The girls were drinking and laughing and cheering. They had each picked a drop of sweat at my collarbone and were having a race to see which one would hit my waistband first. Every time the lead changed, they both took a drink, and whoever was losing had to take a long pull. After the race, Nikki just laid flat and looked at the tent flap.

"You still having your dreams, Danny?"

I replied that I was having a new dream that was even worse than the old scaly tendril one. I started to tell eager listeners about it, but they stopped me halfway through. They said they really didn't want to hear.

Nikki's sister never came out to the tent that night. I guess she looked in and went back to the house, because the next Monday it was all over school about how Danny Fenquist was having this orgy with two girls in a tent.

(continued)

Actually, I think the rumor promoted my popularity.

I woke up about three because the whiskey bottle rolled up against my leg as it was kicked around the tent. It was cold. As I pitched the bottle out of the tent, I noticed it was half full. I looked to my left and saw Nikki sleeping fitfully. On my right, Jenny was looking at my back.

"I can't sleep," she whispered.

"Freddy?"

"Yes."

"I'm supposed to be the one with the nightmares." I wasn't trying to be funny, but she looked at me with weary eyes.

"Don't worry about Freddy; he's no match for those tendrils."

I formed my hand as nearly as possible into the shape of the picture of "The Monkey's Paw" in our Lit book. After I lad back again, Jen put her head on my ribs and curled up in my right arm to sleep. Five minutes later, Nikki did the same on my left.

I spent the rest of the night dreaming of ways to get Freddy. I practiced hitting targets in the far corners of my imagination with the tendrils that had changed. Now they looked like ordinary fingers until I wanted them to attack something. Upon my will, they would instantaneously change form. Sprouting eyes, they would aim themselves exactly at the point I wanted to hit. I was a tendril marksman and could outshoot Billy the Kid because my fingers would have a gun out of his hand before he could squeeze the trigger. Freddy would be no match for me.

When I woke up in the morning, Nikki had gone to the house to use the bathroom. Jen was still asleep with her head on my ribs, so I just lay there and put my left arm around her. She woke up before Nikki came back and looked up at my face.

"What did you dream you were doing, Danny?"

"Waiting for Freddy."

"He won't ever come."

"I know."

"Were you scared?"

"No." She put her head back down and went back to sleep.

Our meetings continued for another two months, when Jen was shipped off to California to live with her father. She had just started an alcohol abuse program before she left. When I was in California last, I brought one of those old bottles, filled it with flowers and put it on top of Jen's stone. The caretaker was not amused. Jen's new stepmother was outraged, but I think Jen smiled somewhere.

Nik is married now. She can't even take a sip of anything alcoholic without getting sick. Her kids are cute. Little Jenny is adorable.

My sister got out of the hospital, and I really like her much better now. I don't have nightmares very much any more, but when I do, I start looking for Freddy.

I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life waiting for Freddy. I just wish Jen were still here asleep against my ribs when I awake from my vigil.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

VIKKI

This is the poem
I always wished you'd write.
It's too late now.
You say you're happy
With Chuck and the second one
"On the way."
You're going to write a book
As soon as you get organized
And write down your ideas
Before they're "forgotten."
And you're going to start a business,
When you find one you like.
You will never pick up a pen
Because you don't smile anymore,
And you will never start a business
Because you are afraid to dream,
And you will never be "happy" with Chuck
Because you remember what it is to be "happy"
And you know that you're not.
I know it too,
Because the greatest dreamer I knew
Doesn't write anymore.
Don't worry,
I won't tell Chuck.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

CLAW-LIKE

Claw-like
Sharpened,
Nasty;
Nails on a blackboard
You sigh.
Quiet,
Muffled,
Baby-talk
I dream a
Definitive goodbye.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

A ROSE BY NATURE

Once, in a field,
Beautiful frail white flowers
Grew in circles of bushes.
Beautiful and harmless.
Save one
With a thorn on its side.
Just one.
Into this frail white field
Came an ordinary beast
Who picked all the flowers
And arranged them "artistically."
Save one
With a thorn in its side.
Just one.
A great wreath was made
With one huge bare spot
That was unfillable.
No flower hurt the beast
Save one
With a thorn in its side.
Just one.
It dyed itself red
To mourn the other dying flowers
Then dug in its roots
Producing more reds
Each one
With a thorn in its side.
Every one.
Frail white flowers died.
Red flowers came up.
They were beautiful and frail,
Now they're perfect.
Each one
With a thorn in its side.
Every one.

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

LIFE?

The said little eyes
looked up at me,
The questioning look
That I could see
Was questioning life
And what it's worth.
Doesn't death begin
The day of birth?

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

JULY AGAIN

Long after the sun sets
and the last of the neighborhood kids
have been called in for a hot bath,
I sit on the warped bottom step
of my back porch.
The sky is a glowing, deep blue
like the blue in a set of Crayola markers,
and chilled blades of overgrown grass crowd themselves
into the spaces between my bare toes.
Beads of moisture tango down my glass of lemonade
leaving a ring shaped puddle when I pick it up,
and particular thoughts of the day
are placed aside by the unseen music of crickets.
Lightning bugs find it the right darkness
to come out and say hi
(the moon and some stars do too)
and its just about then
when tears take the place of what's missing.
You.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

POINSETTIAS

I always wanted to write
A poem on a perfect flower
Everyone else has
Why shouldn't I cliche too?
I just hadn't found one
Until now.
I have one in my hand
Bright scarlet petals
Evergreen leaves
Never needs water
Never needs sunlight
Never dies
Never wilts
Made to last
Made in Taiwan.
It will definitely
Brighten the city dump.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

December 20th

Three hundred
and sixty-five days
do not feel like that many
when I compare them
to how many times
I have played this day over
in my memory.
I cannot seem to lose touch with
your grey EXP
Bennigans
Water Tower
& The Wild Pair.
Columbia,
taxi-cabs,
street musicians,
window shopping
and Santa Claus.
Bloomingdale's...and those damn leather gloves...
...what I would have given to have been *her*.
Your husky laugh,
secrets we shared--
and the way you touched my knee.
"Beetlejuice"
my Christmas tree
Dawn and Mike
and the way you shut the door behind yourself--
that said it all--
and set the calendar in motion...
...365 days.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

PUT ME IN COACH, I'M READY TO PLAY

Four years of Catholic school were about to end. That thought, like a death row inmate's thoughts after the governor calls, monopolized our minds. We sat numbly in the forty-year-old desks, watching the 200-year-old nuns who were our teachers, and realized that the next time we'd see these halls would probably be our 10th high school reunion, when we'd still be checkers at Jewel and waitresses at Wag's but would borrow fur coats, rent a limo and a man, and talk about our success.

What would we have to remember about those long-gone days?

"Hey, Tricia! Remember when I had my wisdom teeth out and ate the cafeteria's Jello for two weeks?"

"Well, what about that time Kim got a *really* bad perm?"

"Yeah! Yeah!"...excited with the glowing memory of it all..."How about when Missy *fainted* in Econ!"...(laughter erupts of out sheer boredom). Later that night the alumni go home to husband, boyfriend, or in most cases, Mom and Dad (Hey, why move out?) and moan about what failures we are and were.

But not us. We have a plan.

Tricia, Kim, Missy, and I had discussed many prank possibilities.

"Let's graduate naked," said Kim, obviously the thinnest of our group. We suspected she only wanted to show her college boyfriend a little bit of thigh (and a lot of everything else), but the rest of us couldn't picture receiving our diplomas from the Bishop and opening our gowns to reveal cellulite and the hair we never shaved above the knee-cap.

"Thank you, God," the Bishop would say, "for giving me this evidence of the validity of my choice in life. I *love* celibacy!"

"Let's replace the choir cassette with the theme from *Star Trek*," said Tricia. It had possibilities. How fitting for the class to walk down the cathedral's vast aisle, expecting to hear *Pomp and Circumstance*, and instead hearing, "Space...the final frontier...." Then again, irony was lost on a great many of our classmates.

Besides, how would we get in the cathedral? Where was the sound system located? What if it was in use on Friday nights for "Club Sabbatical," when the priests got together and danced to Madonna?

It was Missy who suggested we kidnap Jesus.

Assuming that you're familiar with the guy, and remembering that we were in a Catholic school, you must realize how prominent a feature the Big J was in every classroom and hallway. His picture was above the clock in each room, miniature statues were on the sisters' desks, a full-sized mural was in the gym (next to the trophy case), and most important, a life-sized statue stood guard at the entrance to the chapel. We always thought he looked a little like Ronald McDonald out there, urging us into church, where over five-billion have been served.

Numerous pranks had already been pulled on the guy, such as the placing of gum in his open palm or the painting of his exposed toenails, but kidnapping was new.

Phase One was to get ourselves alone in the school after closing. Luckily, the four of us were on the school paper, and whenever an issue was due to the printer, we often stayed until 8 o'clock at night finishing it. We were a recognized presence in the darkened hallways when nuns would leave the adjoining convent in their nighties to walk, check for boys, or snoop into unlocked lockers.

Obviously we could stick around tonight without getting into trouble. There wasn't paper to work on, but we could say we were doing end-of-the-year cleaning in the journalism room. However, if we were seen, it would all be over.

And so, after the final bell rang at 3 that afternoon,

(continued)

our group began vigorously cleaning the classroom. At 3:30, we locked ourselves into the moderator's inner office and began vigorously hiding. Tricia said we would be more effective that way.

"You never saw Mr. Spock *cleaning* before invading a Klingon death ship, did you?"

Kim began to pass our planned five hours of captivity by calling Keith at Southern Illinois University from the office phone. We were, of course, at considerable distance from SIU, but we'd be well into summer vacation and college acceptance letters before the school would get the bill, so we indulged her.

I began digging through boxes, shelves, and desk drawers, looking for things to sell to pay my way through higher education. I'd accumulated several of Shakespeare's works when Missy and Tricia accomplished their goal of the past four years--to break into the locked file cabinet of our moderator's *real* thoughts!

Our journalism teacher wasn't a num. She was insane. Freshman year, when the four of us met and became friends, Ms.-- was basically normal, except for her hair. Sophomore year, she divorced and began buying clothes with the child support payments. Every one of the new outfits looked exactly the same. Junior year, when Kim met Keith, Missy and I got jobs, and Tricia was still Tricia, Ms.-- flunked an entire American Lit class for being late. By senior year, the woman went crackers. She ate constantly, ballooning her weight and giving her an excuse to do more shopping. Her hair got more and more..well, just more and more each day.

She fired the editor-in-chief of the newspaper and gave me the job because I "looked like a clean girl." She hated Tricia but couldn't fire her because Tricia's mother was on the church board and could have her excommunicated. She thought Missy was quiet and Kim was brain dead. Within two months I had her hating me, which wasn't too bad, because I didn't feel guilty about stealing her lunch money anymore.

Now we were on the threshold of reading her innermost thoughts about the girls in her English and journalism classes.

"Here," said Missy, "It's the old editor's file! Chrissie was fired because I just 'can't stand that girl. She thinks she's perfect. Mommy and Daddy bought that damn car! As far as I'm concerned, she can work at McDonald's the rest of her life!'"

Ms.-- by the way, worked part-time at the Pizza Hut across the street from Chrissie's McDonald's. She also lived in a glass house with a gravel driveway.

"Ah...my file!" smiled Tricia, looking at each one of us (except Kim, who was in the midst of mush on the phone) to extend the dramatic pause. "'Tricia appears to be an intelligent, sensitive, and independent girl,'" she began reading, "'but,'" and she paused again, "'she's weird.'"

We laughed a little louder than people hiding in an office and breaking into private files should have.

After three-and-a-half hours of snooping, spying, and pledging our eternal love to Keith (and heartily gagging after), we were ready for Phase Two of Mission Immaculate--nabbing Jesus.

"Should we pray or something?" asked Kim when we had You-Know-Who in our arms outside the chapel.

"I'm not sure," I said. "Is there some sort of blessing/confession for sacrilege in the name of school spirit?"

Never mind. We started walking down the hallway to the stairs outside, Jesus kind of dragging his feet behind us.

"This is just like that *Footprints* slide show we watched on retreat," said Missy, ever the meditative one.

Suddenly we were face-to-face with Sister Anna Maria Anita, the Spanish teacher who lapsed into French every so often.

"*Hola!*" she shouted, being deaf.

"*Que pasa hombre?*" said Tricia.

"*Grey Poupon,*" said Sister Anna Maria Anita in a beautiful French accent. "Now girls," she continued, "you know the rules. No boys in the school. Perhaps this man is one of your boyfriends," she squinted, being blind as well, "but for heaven's sake girls, he's got a full beard! Why don't you date a freshman? It would be such a boost to his ego!" With that she walked away.

"Date a freshman?" gasped Kim.

We, too, were shocked.

We slowly dragged Our Lord down the stairs, discussing the meaning of life on the way down.

"You really think Morticia could beat up Lily Munster?" asked Missy. "She walked awful slow in that dress."

"Now, what if the husbands got involved?" said Tricia. "Do you honestly think Gomez could whip Herman's butt?"

"And do you think Morticia's kid, Wednesday, is related to Lady Tuesday on the *Mister Rogers Show*?" I asked.

"God, is Keith a good kisser..," concluded Kim from some distant planet.

Jesus was just outside the journalism room when we realized he wouldn't be comfortable in there, implicating us and everything, so we began that good old newspaper trauma trick--brainstorming. Where to put him? The locker room showers, soap in hand...the hallway, his outstretched arm holding a mop...the laundry room, folding, ummm...nun underwear? It was Kim, momentarily snapping out of the clutches of Keith, who found the perfect place.

Mass was canceled the next morning; softball practice too.

(continued)

Goofiness seemed to take over the school. The Dean was in a tizzy, the principal in a hissy, and the nurse in the halls, advising all of us not to get pregnant this summer. Sister Anna Maria Anita accused Ms.--of "educational uncredibility" and took over English classes for the day, teaching everyone to sing, *Feliz Cumpleanos Frere Jacques.*

That was the night we'll talk about at every future meeting, whether it be a reunion or bagging one another's groceries. That was the day that Jesus stole first base.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

NOVEMBER 27TH, 1989. 10:33 PM

You made me cry,
you little boy.
You held my hand
and stole my heart.

It's a shame
that those black glasses of yours
couldn't clear
your clouded vision.

It's a shame
that it took THIS
for me to realize
that my rose-colored glasses
don't fit
in our black and white world.

But I've taken them off...
and see you
for who you are:
you little boy.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

TO DAD

I realize I have given you headaches by being a scholastic sloth in a family where academics are everything. I am not the mathematician you are, couldn't balance a chemical equation, even with instruction, and am probably the first male Loewe in four generations who couldn't get through engineering school if he won the lottery and bribed all his professors. In some ways, we are very dissimilar people.

Your mustache stares back at me from the mirror. My body sprouts your hair. I talk like you and share the same gestures and booming bass voice. Our ethics correspond like DNA. In some ways, we are very similar men.

We are very alike and very different. We never agree on anything because that's our nature. We fight and bitch and argue that the other one doesn't know anything or can't see the nose on his face, but Lord help the outsider who has the audacity to raise his voice at one of us while the other is in earshot.

When I was in eighth grade and you got a phone call from an irate parent accusing me of gluing a box of fish food to his antique desk, you defended me merely because I said I was innocent. You had no reason to believe me, and most fathers wouldn't have. Defying the two kids and four parents who called me a liar, you defended me. How far wrong can a kid go with a role model like that?

You don't know this, but your feelings are betrayed by your eyes. I first noticed them at a camporee when I was fourteen. I sat there staring at the three first-place ribbons I had won. The two leaders were itchin' and scratchin' about the troop finally getting its act together to win, and you politely stood there, back straight, chest full, your eyes saying, "you dumb schmucks, my son won those ribbons." They saw your eyes and knew exactly what you were thinking. Their eyes never again strayed above your collar bone. I was the only boy whose father was proud of him and the only son who didn't feel worthy.

I do love you, but can't say it. I could hug you, but I don't. If you ever doubt my faith in you, look in my eyes, watch me strut, back straight, chest out, and know that the flair and the resolve that once earned me the nickname of Genghis Khan is inherited.

§§§§§

Joey McGrath

A SON'S LOVE

My father's death was a most horrifying experience. When most people die, they die quickly. Not my father. His death lasted a lifetime until he finally died.

All during my father's life, he suffered from an unexplainable illness. He would have attacks that would render him in a comatose state for hours at a time. His breathing would stop and his heartbeat would slow down to an almost undetectable rate. All color would vanish from his flesh and leave him with an ashen gray skin color. His body temperature would drop until he felt deathly cold. But as quickly as these attacks came, they left just as quickly. Father would awaken from his death sleep not even knowing it had ever happened.

(continued)

Of all the physicians that diagnosed my father, not one could find a reason or a cure. He simply lived with the attacks. When I was a young boy, about 13, he suffered from the attacks once every other month. As years passed, his attacks progressively got worse. By the time I had reached the age of 20, and my father 53, he had an attack every other day. Plus, the duration of the attacks lengthened to an all-day experience.

The attacks never changed his attitude toward life. He never let the attacks worry him because he told me once that worrying would not solve his problem. He tried to keep up with family matters, but his attacks hindered him too much.

A year later, the devastating day arrived for me and mother. And father. My father had had an attack and had not awakened in over thirty-six hours. My mother called our family doctor, Dr. Frederick Morissey, to come over and see what he could do.

Dr. Morissey arrived at our home a few hours later. My mother greeted him, then showed him into the bedroom. She closed the door behind her, leaving me to stand in the dark, empty hall. No sound came from the room. Twenty minutes passed.

Dr. Morissey opened the door and stepped into the hall. He closed the door behind him. Before he closed the door, a brief glimpse of my mother crying entered my field of vision.

"I suppose you know what has happened?" he asked.

"Yes. Are you positively sure he's dead?"

"Yes. The entire time I was in there I didn't hear a single heartbeat. No pulse. Nothing. He is, without a doubt, dead."

I released a breath that was long overdue to be expelled. He continued.

"Will your mother be all right? I can give her a tranquilizer if necessary."

"No. I'll look after her."

He nodded. He patted me on the right shoulder, then I entered the bedroom to try and console my mother. That day was April 16th, 1949.

***

The funeral was three days later. Mother believed in the old-fashioned methods of burial. Father was not processed for burial. The casket was made from beautifully polished walnut.

The funeral was over and my mother was standing next to the local pastor, Fr. Davies. I was watching the groundskeepers who were filling in the grave. Fr. Davies was doing his best to console my mother.

I walked near the first worker and watched him fill the grave with dirt. In a matter of fifteen minutes, the hole was filled. The two workers were now leveling the dirt with rakes getting it ready to lay down sod.

The worker farthest from me stopped abruptly. The worker near me kept raking for a minute, then he also stopped. They looked at each other with a startled look across their faces. I looked at them questioningly and approached the grave. I was about to speak when I heard it also.

Thump.

My blood ran an icy current through my chest.

Thump.

Muffled to almost nonexistence but still I heard it. I dropped to my knees and put my ear to the ground. Like a howling wind through distant trees I heard my father screaming inside his early grave.

Thump. Thump.

His fists were beating the sides of the coffin. I looked at the workers who stood horrified.

"Jesus Christ! Dig him out!" I yelled.

They dropped their rakes and ran for the work cart a few plots over. I didn't wait. I started clawing dirt away with my bare hands. Looking over my shoulder I saw Fr. Davies keeping mymother calm and back away from the grave.

I stopped and listened.

Critch-critch.

He was trying to scratch his way out, not knowing we were trying to answer his cries.

The two workers returned with shovels and immediately started to dig at the soft dirt. They were digging in a frenzy paying no attention to where they were tossing the dirt.

The screaming continued.

The workers were trying to dig faster, but they only tired themselves faster. By then, they had about another four feet to dig before they reached the casket. The screaming and scratching grew louder as the workers narrowed the barrier of soil.

It took another twenty minutes before one of the workers tapped the lid of the coffin with his shovel. A Few minutes later, the entire top of the casket had been uncovered. Even though my father must have heard us working above him, his screaming and scratchings had not stopped. One of the workers looked to me for further instructions.

"Bust the locks," I demanded.

The workers then proceeded to beat upon the locks with the edges of the spades. the first lock broke. A few minutes later, the second broke. The third. Then finally the fourth lock broke. They lifted the lid open and revealed the insane creature that was once my father.

My father sat upright in his casket and continued to claw at an imaginary lid. He cocked his head back and began to howl madly. I noticed that his hands and fingers were a bloody mess from the continuous clawing and scratching at the coffin lid. Splinters of wood stood out from his bloody, shredded fingertips. He had clawed at his

(continued)

own face while in the coffin and it now had long, deep scratches running like gory furrows along the length of it. In the process of clawing his face, he had scratched out his right eye. A clear fluid ran down his right cheek to the corner of his open, screaming mouth.

Fr. Davies called me out of my terrified state.

"Thomas! Thomas, come quickly!" he shouted from behind me.

I turned to see Fr. Davies kneeling beside my mother, who was lying on the ground.

Forgetting my father, I ran to my unconscious mother. As I approached, I noticed she looked extremely pale. Fr. Davies was gently rubbing her left wrist when I knelt down beside her. After a few minutes of rubbing my mother's wrist, Fr. Davies stopped and felt her wrist for a pulse. A few moments later, he looked into my gaze and by the expression on his face, I knew what he was about to say.

"I'm sorry, Thomas. I don't know what to say." He stopped and swallowed hard. "I don't know what to say." He was on the verge of tears.

I, however, burst into tears. Great racking sobs shook my body. She was dead. Gone from this world to leave me with a raving madman. For a second, while I was crying, I actually felt envious. Envious that she did not have to deal with this situation. I pushed back the tears and inhaled deeply. I got up and told Fr. Davies: "I'll be right back."

"I understand," he said as he looked at my howling father.

I walked over to my father. He wasn't sitting in his coffin any more. He had stripped off his clothing and was standing nude in his casket. The workers had backed off a few paces and stood awestruck. One thing had not changed, though. He was still screaming as loudly as possible. His screaming seemed to strike a raw nerve in my body. The scream had turned hoarse from the continued strain on his throat. Every muscle on his body was tensed. His mouth formed a perfect "O" as a line of spittle slowly descended from his bottom lip. Trickles of blood ran from his right, empty eye socket.

This is what I was left with. How was I to care for a screaming lunatic. Was I to take care of him myself or was I to send him to a psychiatric clinic? I had to take care of him. It was my duty. I owed him this much. I stood there in front of him. Thinking.

While I stood there, something even more horrible happened. Something even worse than burying my father alive.

I had my first attack.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

THE ROOMMATE

You've become programmed
like a computer
that echoes my faults
and how badly I've mismanaged things.
And all the obligations
of a partnership
have fallen on me.
You rustle in your bed
like a tied, deserted lamb
or cry moans of memories
as you garden the window box
filled with dead flowers,
keeping me awake all night
with your singing anthems of
dead love between tears.
I've been hoping one thing
I hope you fall in love
again as long as I'm here.
But I pray I could fall
in love and lose
so I could keep you awake
all night and blame you
for neglected laundry and
a half starved cat.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

WHY DON'T I JUST CALL THE LANDLORD?

Have you ever tried to study while some jerk in the apartment below is playing Nintendo? Nintendo, a game devised by idiots to be played by idiots. I'm sure the idiots whose brainchild Nintendo is are laughing maniacally all the way to the bank.

There is a certain insistence about the sound made by an electronic television game that fiendishly penetrates the brain, causing one's mind to record nothing but "beep, beep," or "toot, toot." Neither of these words actually describes the sound. It's a sort of combination of the two, sort of a "teep, teep," or "boot, boot." Combine this irritating noise with the sound of a very nasal rendition of a popular country-western ballad, and the crying of two children, and you have a vague idea of what I listen to in the evenings when I should be studying.

Why are the children crying? Because they want to play Nintendo, but the grownups won't let them. Why won't the grownups let them play? Because the grownups are playing, that's why!

I hate living in an apartment.

§§§§§

Heather Eller

COMPANION

I sit quiet and alone,
pencil in hand,
canvas in front of me,
I set up a frame,
for my ideas to be built upon,
I start soft curving lines,
along with some hard edges,
soon the canvas comes alive,
with what I've just created,
I sit quiet and alone no more.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

FLATTERY

I purchased her for a dollar down and a dollar a week from a man who couldn't get the dealer to take her as a trade-in. I put a muffler and tires on her to make her road safe and drove to my girlfriend's house. She declared, "This car isn't going to get you anywhere!" and Flattery was christened.

First the hood flew off and broke the windshield. We wired the hood back on and Flattery kept running. When I was on vacation my cousin wrecked my car. Her insurance company gave me four hundred dollars and let me keep the car. I was money ahead, and Flattery kept running.

My Junior year in high school, I discovered the couch-like front seat was more fun when I wasn't driving. More than Flattery was running then! Later some pranksters yanked the ignition wiring. I put the wiring back together and Flattery didn't sound happy, but she was running! I pulled the valve covers and found the noisemaker--twenty ball bearings. Afterward, Flattery ran better than ever.

When I was eighteen, I sold my Malibu to a friend for two-hundred bucks. Five years later, Flattery is still running. My father liked the car because I made more money on it than I paid for her and gas. I will always remember her because, not only did Flattery get me everywhere, she also brought me back again.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

MAKING THE SOCIAL ROUNDS

Making the social rounds
With my tail tucked between my legs,
I long to be like Eeyore
And let the damn thing fall off.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

I ONLY SOUGHT TO BE YOUR FRIEND

I only sought to be your friend.
Not your hero, champion, or magic man.
You needed a friend,
I needed to learn to trust again.
I never dreamed
of riding in on a mustang
to fend off the red troll
or making fireworks explode on May evenings.
I didn't plan a quest,
yet I brought you the Eagle Medallion.
I had no intention
of allowing you to see your future.
I wished only to lighten your past
so that I might see you smile,
and perhaps laugh once or twice.
Now you know laughter,
and shall enjoy it,
as long as you have
the lion of fame and resolve
as your champion
I will remain.
I ask for your love
and offer my best,
and my trust
as your hero,
and champion,
and magic man.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

FRIENDS

Some "friends" are as
Unpredictable as the ocean's waves.
But "true friends" are as
Reliable as its tides.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

I KNOW PEOPLE

I know people
Have got it worse--
But they've
Got it better, too.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

LIFE AND LOVE

Life's field of holds,
fall in, climb out.
Love is a goal.
Fall in, climb out!
Burns our souls
over here and there about.
Life's field of holes
fall in, climb out.

§§§§§

Norma Dodge

FROM A MODERN DAY ROMEO

If I could write a poem to you,
It wouldn't say, "I love you true."
It wouldn't say, "I miss you, too."
It wouldn't speak of rendezvous.
The essence would be, "Come on, let's screw."

§§§§§

Matthew R. Horn

OPENING NIGHT

The sensation
The thrill
Any moment now you'll step out.
Your lines are memorized
Your places are known
Still you feel like you forgot
Something,
Like staying in bed.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

UNDER WRAPS

I finished sipping tea
in the dressing room
watched myself
in black-laced underwear
from six directions
sipping tea as grandly
as a pearl-necked matron,
left the white cup
quite empty
stood there
digging my red-painted toenails
into the thick beige carpet
examining myself
from six sides
feeling, all at once,
disgust, delight, amazement,
for what I am, have been,
sadly aware
that thoughts don't share
as easily as reflections
knowing
the knowing couldn't show
in any of the six mirrors.

§§§§§

James Wolverton

MOON LIGHT

Moon light,
leaving the tree outline
silhouette dancing on my wall.
Restless,
What a crazy life,
3-D reality,
Over flows the ivory cup.
Possible solutions
never sense.
Time to change,
start fresh.
Moon light,
come back,
I'm not finished thinking.

§§§§§

Rosalyn Neitzel

IN THE PITCH OF DARK

In the pitch of dark
I saw myself.
Screaming silently,
Wake up fool
You're not asleep.

§§§§§

Matthew R. Horn

COUPLES

When I go places with friends,
I feel out of place.
Because they are in couples,
And I'm in my own space.

Nobody to hold hands with,
Not one to kiss.
There's no one to turn to,
And that's what I miss.

I feel even more alone,
In cases like that.
Then when I sit down,
With someone to chat.

I hate the feelings inside,
When I'm with couples.
It reminds me of my situation,
And the pain kind of doubles.

§§§§§

Shonda Talerico

SPARK AND FLAME

When the shapely sophomore noticed that the nerdy senior with the frostbitten ear across the aisle was staring at her that cold morning in study hall, that was the moment that my parents knew that they were destined to be together. How two complete opposites could stay together for twenty-two years is a mystery. As different as night and day, a more accurate description would be one of fire. My father is a warm glimmering flame; my mother is a firecracker, an explosion. Their differences are many.

My mother, Sue, is about 5'8", or 6" counting her pencil-thin spiked heels, which she frequently wears. She weighs about 130 pounds, and most of the time, she is covered with black leather, studs, junk jewelry, and anything pertaining to Harley-Davidson. Her hair is as loud as she is--bright red.

My father, Mike, has thinning black hair, and is about as tall as his wife, although she sometimes towers over him wearing her stiletto heels. He has the Bert-of-*Sesame-Street* eyebrows that grow in a straight line across his forehead and a Cheech Marin mustache. Because his shoulders are rounded, his spine protrudes like dinosaur bones through his thin flannel shirts. On his left forearm is a menacing snake and dagger tattoo, left over from his biker days.

My mom is not your typical mother. She doesn't sit around all day watching soap operas eating bon-bons. She has shingled a roof, driven a tractor in 100-degree-plus heat with oversized headphones strapped to her head, and singlehandedly dug all of the holes for our fenceposts on our ten acre yard--all in a string bikini. Femininity is not a dominating quality in my mother, who has to bleach her hands to get them clean, and whose heels have more cracks in them than a parched patch of land.

She's the only parent I know who has won prizes in hot legs contests--beating out women twenty years her junior who strip in earnest to beat her. She attended a Motley Crue concert with me a few years ago, and instead of stuffing earplugs into her ears and complaining about being there, she enjoyed it, standing up on the seat to get a better look and asking me what songs they were playing. She even raised her fist in response to "Shout at the Devil," one of the Crue's "rock anthems."

She likes to read magazines, but not the normal motherly magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. *Easyrider* and *Harley Women* are more to her liking, chock full of bitches, boobs and bikes.

On the other hand, my father is the much quieter parent. A full-blooded Italian, he's the kind who trains his children like soldiers and doesn't get too involved in family matters--except when it comes to disciplining his two daughters. Then he makes his wrath known, with classic punishments such as "no phone," or "no going anywhere for the week/the weekend/this month/two months/until I say so/until you've learned your lesson."

Every weekend for as long as I can remember he planted himself in front of the TV and flipped on the game. A beer in one hand, a seven-course snack spread out in front of him like King Henry, and he was content. He will not move from the screen or make a sound until something exciting happens during the Sox/Bulls/Bears game, like the first home run/basket/touchdown. Then he attempts to cheer, bellowing like a moose, and usually loses his voice for a few days.

He doesn't walk, he shuffles along like a slug, a noisy slug scuffling his slippers. Our floor has a permanent path to the kitchen sunk into the floor. Late at night, I would hear his dragging walk, sounding like a special effect from an old, cheap, horror movie. Just when it sounds like the ghoul is going to get you, the dim refrigerator bulb streams across his bony body--Dad's hungry again. His stomach is like the Black Hole--it never fills up. An hour after dinner, he'll shuffle into the kitchen and make himself a whole meal. And he doesn't gain a pound.

One of his favorite pastimes is fishing. Many afternoons he positions himself in our creek, knee-deep in useless minnows and carp, while brown water fills his wading boots. Hoping to catch something, he'll stay out all day. When, and if, he does, he always tosses it back.

(continued)

It's just for the thrill, although his female family members can't figure out the point in all of this.

They seem to be total opposites, but there are three things that they do have in common--their love for Harley-Davidsons, each other, and being my parents.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

VERY OFTEN

Very often
I think of that chilly Monday in November
when we stood outside for hours
and watched a giant full moon
pass through the swatches of clouds.
Very often
I think of how much I wanted to
kiss you,
but I couldn't because we are
"just friends."
And very often
I think that if we are "just friends,"
then what were we doing
staring at a full moon
together?

§§§§§

Thomas J. Goode

BLUNDER IN THE BALCONY

The town I grew up in has changed considerably in the last thirty years. There is little traffic. Very few people walk the streets. Most of the stores and cinemas are concentrated into two separate malls within the outskirts of the township. The downtown streets have been rerouted. "Cruising the loop," driving around a centrally-located block, is no longer possible. I do have some memories. I would like to share one with you.

My family lived approximately two miles from the downtown area. All the movie theaters were then downtown. My older brother, sister, and I decided to go to the movies. We walked one city block to the bus stop to wait for the bus. It wasn't a long wait, and soon the bus came. The bus pulled up in front of us and the driver let us in. A ten cent token was required by each of us for the ride. I spent most of the ride reading graffiti on the back of the bus seat in front of me. It wasn't a long ride and soon we were downtown. The bus stopped in front of Grant's store and we got off.

There was a lot of hustling and bustling going on downtown. The sidewalks were full of people walking to their various destinations. Police blew their whistles at intersections, directing the bountiful traffic. It was a short walk to the infamous Rialto Theater where the movie was playing we were to see.

"That will be thirty-five cents," said the lady at the ticket booth. I gave her my dollar and she returned my change. My brother and sister had already purchased their tickets and were handing them to the usher at the door. I caught up with them and handed the man my ticket.

We walked into the Rialto Theater. It is a beautiful place built in the 1920's. It resembled a king's palace. The walls and floors are marble. The ceilings are sculptured and are connected to the floors by tall pillars. Large chandeliers are precariously suspended from the ceilings, or so they seemed. I always hoped they would not fall on my head. Decorative, finely upholstered high back chairs were along the walls. They looked like thrones.

We made our way over to the concession stand. I bought a bag of popcorn for fifteen cents and a cup of orange soda for ten. I forget what the others bought. We followed a crowd to the entrance doors of the main floor.

"There isn't any seats open. We'll have to go up into the balcony," said my brother. So up the stairs we went along with many others who had the same idea. Although there were many people in the balcony, we managed to spy several vacant seats dead center in the first row. Next came a juggling act. I held tight my bag of popcorn with one hand and squeezed firmly my orange soda with the other. We gingerly walked between others already seated and a three-foot-high wall that ran in front of the first row of the balcony. Just as we managed to get to our seats, my foot caught on the leg of a chair. My hand that held the cup of orange soda was thrust forward and down. The orange soda flew out of the cup. It seemed to fall in slow motion. We watched with horror as the soda proceeded to splash off the top of a bald headed man seated directly below on the main floor. He was furious! He looked up menacingly at us. It was a good thing the theater was dark.

"Let's get out of here!" exclaimed my brother. We followed his lead to the rear of the balcony. We seated ourselves in the uppermost seats.

"You dummy!" yelled my brother.

"I tripped!" I replied defensively.

Soon ushers with flashlights came down the main aisle of the balcony. They made their way to the first row and shone their lights where we had just been. Seeing no one there, they left.

"That was a close one!" my sister said. I sighed with relief. The movie was playing and I munched on popcorn. I never forgot what happened.

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

NOTHING LOOKS THE SAME IN THE LIGHT

With desires of the night
working on our side,
we decided to try again
and renew our love that died.

All of our pride was left behind
on that warm summer's night.
We admitted that we needed each other,
and said that we would make it right.

We lost ourselves in passion,
and let all our feeling show.
And the way I felt about you then,
I could never let you go.

But then the sun began to rise
despite my begging it to stay,
and our feelings disappeared like shadows
as soon as the sun shone our way.

We woke up unable to show
that our love was still there
so we went our separate ways,
pretending not to care.

The sun evaporated our love
and carried it out of sight
making us realize
that nothing looks the same in the light.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

THE PARTY

I watched the small digital clock click to 9:00 and yelled for Sam to help me close a cash register. We looked ridiculously posh and important...working in the trendy department store selling sexy Christmas lingerie to older women and timid boyfriends.

A Schlan's associate beamed with sarcastic enthusiasm over the intercom. "Our store is now closed. Thank you for shopping at Schlan's. Our store will reopen at 10:00 tomorrow. Thank you."

Sam came dancing over in her red bolero jacket and black pants. "Let's go to that par-teee!" she sang. Sam was Mexican and Italian. She was perfect. I envied her as much as I adored her. She counted change while I entered the currency into the computer. We finished closing our register in record time and went to drop our money and media bags off at Customer Service.

We said goodbye to all we knew and went to my car. The Matteson-Richton Park area where we worked was not exactly posh and important. It was south of Chicago and shadowed with stories of Drug Lords and Mafia tales.

My car knew the way to Justin's on its own. We got out and were greeted at his apartment door by people I hadn't seen since high school. Everyone was home for the Thanksgiving weekend...and were definitely on their way to regretting it as they downed huge tumblers of beer and schnapps.

Sam looked nervous and uncomfortable. She had come with for the sole purpose of meeting my dashingly handsome best friend, Brandon, who I had promised to set her up with. Who was I kidding? One look and Brandon would be in love.

Justin was in the kitchen mixing drinks. This boy was a real entertainer. Other parties had cover charges at the door and supplied a lonely keg of beer. Justin made daiquiris and margaritas for his guests, charging them nothing but a good time and keys at the door.

I led Sam through the hallway of posters. "love and Rockets," "The Cure," and James Dean smiled down at us as we passed their captivity. Justin regarded us with warm hellos and full glasses. In no time, Sam was mingling as well as I was. We laughed and gossiped and talked and drank.

Brandon appeared at the screen door...and answered my questions by becoming quiet enamored of Sam. They sat on folding chairs in the front room and discussed life and the obnoxious party crashers that had been turned away just as Brandon had arrived.

I kissed Brandon's cheek but was rewarded with his ear. "Meghan, come sit here," he ordered. I laughed and turned around into Justin's shirt.

"Meg!" Justin giggled. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine!" I laughed. I rarely drink and I was gone.

"Do you want some pineapple?" he offered.

"All right."

He went to get a slice for me from his barrel of punch, and I went to sit on his first floor patio. I stood on the cement porch and studied the lights from the complex across the parking lot. What was going on, I wondered. Justin was being so nice. We were like best friends...him and me. He was sooo funny! I anticipated Tuesday and Thursday art class to see and laugh with him. But Andrea, his live-in girlfriend, intimidated me terribly. She gave me looks to kill...did she know something that I didn't?

The sliding door opened and Justin appeared. "There wasn't any pineapple left," he apologized.

"That's okay," I smiled.

Without any foreshadowing, without a clue, without verbal foreplay, I reached my left hand out to

(continued)

touch his right cheek. One million thoughts rambled through my mind, each one chanting in elf-like whispers to my sanity.

"What are you DOing?"

"Is this right?"

"Are you CRAZ-eee?"

"He's your FRIEND!"

But all that my conscious could comprehend was which way to tilt my face. Was it to the left? It must have been the left. Justin pushed my arm out of the way as he grabbed my face with both of his hands and kissed me.

To think of our first kiss today is rather ludicrous. If I had been sober, I might still remember every soppy detail. His hands clamped my face, mine found solace in his hair.

Everything spun. The blue streetlights and my heave emotions. His black shirt. My black shirt. I kissed with the hopeless flair of a move star. He kissed with the insatiable desire of a python.

Reality struck me like a blow in the face and I put my hands on his waist and pushed him backwards. Justin looked at me with momentary shock. I simply stared at him. What? What was that? Had these feelings always been there? Or had they been conceived and born simultaneously thirty seconds ago?

I went inside and he followed. Sam laughed and Brandon applauded with, "About TIME!"

About time? What did he mean, "about time"? Sam was past her curfew. I drove her home and gave her the details...how would I ever face art class on Tuesday again?

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

COLD BLUES

Cold blues
In the empty parking lot
Of an abandoned bar.
Silence now
Where once adult difficulties
Were solved with
Underage drinking.
Time to grow up.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

LOVE YA TILL I'M DEAD

It's easy to admire you from far away
And why not? You're Miss Popularity
I try to talk but love cannot speak
So I just dream of having you with me
I'll tell you what the doctor told me
He doesn't give me long to live
So I figure I may as well go for it
And share all the loving I can give
I want you, but I can only wonder
Once they put me six feet under
I'll love ya till I'm dead
A month or two is all it would take
It won't take you much out of your way
On April the first we could go be wed
And you could be a widow by May
I'm not worth much, but only while I'm here
My insurance policy is quiet high
If you would just be patient and wait till I go
It'll be like winning the lottery when I die
I want what's best; I'd do you no harm
At least not after I buy the farm
I'll love ya till I'm dead
I have to act while I still have time
I'm in a hell of a predicament
We're perfect for each other--I'm going to heaven
And to me you've been heaven sent
So please hear me out while I still have breath
I don't think it's all to selfish
To spend some time with a lonely guy
And give him his final dying wish
I'll love ya till I'm dead
We both know what lies ahead.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

SHE MADE HER APPEARANCE

She made her appearance
Like a beautiful little starlet
With a purse full of talent
While we, the nobodies,
Simply showed up.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

JEALOUSY

I watched his eyes
turn to her
and pitied myself
for losing him.

My jealousy took flight.
Although she had been my friend,
I hated her
with a passion.

I shunned them both
and stood apart to watch them flirt
and cried alone with frustration
for losing him & for losing her
to each other.

§§§§§

Shonda Talerico

ENVY

Johnson* says
Envy admits
Inferiority
to one of Superiority

so be it

Envy
the Villain in me
will always lurk
twisting and winding
as ivy
on a wall must crawl
Envy in me will grow

*Poet Dr. Samuel Johnson

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

INVISIBLE FAREWELL

The wake was a disappointment
With only a picture of a face to view.
Grief didn't come easy while a photo smiled at me.
I needed to see flesh in its feelingless.
Say farewell to a face devoid of emotions
Touch a chilled foreboding hand.
It would help me accept
non-existence.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

WHEN YOU'RE AWAY

Your secret fingers
stay touching
long after you're gone--
I feel them everywhere,
try not to shiver.
Your secret voice
whispers in the small of my back;
I listen, straining to hear.
I know the words already,
try not to laugh out loud.
I feel like a little girl at Christmas--
can't tell what's in the packages
for Daddy.
If somebody would tickle me
I'd laugh out loud
and, maybe, shiver.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

TIME KILLS

When the moment arrives, it will be too late
Time passes by all too fast
It is impossible to have fun in life
Because the good moments never last
Time is an obstacle that is immovable
It keeps fun and me far apart
Pleasure in life is beyond my grasp
When its conclusion precedes its start
A problem that has no solution
Like a disaster I cannot prevent
Would someone please tell me now
Where all the good times went?

§§§§§

Jerry Janes

DEATH ON THE TOLLWAY
(or freeway, depends how you look at it, Kim)

Oliver--a teenage, male deer
Patty--a teenage, female deer
Bill--a 1977 Pontiac Bonneville Brougham
James and Frank--two fascist-pig good ol' boys with
ammunition, various weapons, alcohol,
memberships in the NRA, and that "sportin' edge"
Greg and Sasha--Two humans growing up in the future

Location: A wooded, secluded area somewhere in nearby

(continued)

Madison, Wisc.

Oliver: Hi Patty.
Patty: Hi Oliver, um, would you care to groom my fur?
Oliver: I'd like that. (He grooms Patty with his tongue.)
Patty: That feels great, Oliver. You know, I really like this whole deer-thing. I remember in a past life that I was human. All my life was filled with was frustration and some occasional situations that I found pleasurable due to social pressures and media propaganda, but then I read philosophy and realized my error and then after that--all my life was filled with not only frustration, but a deeply seeded feeling of inadequacy, leading to my eventual suicide.
Oliver: (Removes his tongue from Patty's underside) Oh wow, Patty. That's too heavy. Don't forget, we're only deer, after all.
Patty: You're right. Sorry. Don't forget my genitals.
Oliver: Oh, I *won't*!

(The two traipse off into a nearby bush to talk. James and Frank enter from the left. Kraftwerk's "TransEurope Express" plays in the background.)

James: I can smell 'em from miles away. It's that funky unbathed smell that spells "deer" to me.
Oliver: (Quietly to Patty) I can smell 'em from miles away. It's that funky out-of-place smell that spells "fool" to me.
Frank: There's a couple. Let's git em!
Patty: ASSHOLES! (Two shots ring out.)

We now go to a very psychedelic time sequence in which the spirits of Oliver and Patty do absolutely nothing other than stay in their respective corpses, but it was time for some good visual effects. Thin Lizzy's "Boys Are Back In Town" plays in the background. Frank and James take the lifeless forms back to their car and strap them on the roof. They begin their victorious trip home.

Oliver: Have you ever done this before?
Patty: Done what?
Oliver: Be dead?
Patty: YES, I just was explaining to you about one of my past life experiences, and you have the gall to question my validity as a mystic!
Oliver: Sorry, I just haven't been dead before.
Bill: You're getting blood on my headlights!
Oliver: (To Patty) What was that? (Patty continues to drain blood.)
Bill: Me. I'm Bill, the car. Hi.
Patty: Let me ask you, Bill, how can you talk?
Bill: How can YOU talk--number one, you're dead. Number two, you're a deer. How else? It's a story. I can do anything. Watch!

(Bill does anything.)

Oliver: That's pretty far out.
Patty: (To Oliver) Shut up. Hey--what's the big deal with our getting shot. I mean, what did we ever do to them?
Bill: Well, I overheard them talking on the way here. Seems there's some sort of overpopulation of deer in these parts, so instead of the government transporting their excess deer to a different sit, they let hunters have their fill. It's a lot cheaper, the humans get out some aggression on worthless animals, and it's a great male-bonding thing.
Oliver: I can relate.
Patty: Well, I can't! If there are so many of us, and this creates a threat to the local environment due to our grazing patterns, and that justifies our population being depleted through gunfire, then I feel that I have the same right to kill off as many humans as I can, and justify the killings with the common knowledge that all environmental problems faced are due to the overpopulation of the human species, and the rise in technology for the support and propagation of that very same cancerous species. (Patty's carcass begins to wiggle free of the ropes.)
Oliver: Hey, how are you doing that? You're dead!
Patty: Like Bill said, it's a story. I can do anything!
Bill: Far out, Babe!
Oliver: Jesus Christ.
James: It sounds like they're slipping. Let's pull off to tighten 'em up. (The car pulls over to the side of the road. The two men get out of the car.)
Patty: (To Oliver) When I say the word, we go!
Frank: Sure enough, let's get more rope. (The two pop the trunk and begin searching for more rope.)
Patty: FUR IS DEAD!!!!!
(Patty breaks free of the ropes and slams the trunk lid down on Frank and James, decapitating the two of them in the process.)
Bill: My, that was clean! Nice job.
Patty: Thanks.
Oliver: (Mumbling in a trance, legs locked in the lotus position) Fur is dead. Fur is dead? Fur is...fur...is...is fur...
Patty: Get yourself together, Comrade. There is much for us to do. We must call to arms all our fallen brothers and sisters in the cause!
Oliver: Save a tree...save a...tree a save?...
Bill: Here, let me help. (Bill helps. Oliver and Patty load the guns, jump into Bill, and ride into the first town they come to. They proceed to slaughter all its citizens. Since they do not perceive human emotion, they feel it to be justified. They ride through the country and employ various dead animals to their cause. They become a movement. Headlines carry word of the human losses, totaling millions within weeks. The movement grows into a highly organized homicidal machine. Oliver and Patty soon need not to do any of the killing themselves. They move into Graceland, headquarters for AJTH,

(continued)

Animals for the Justified Treatment of Humans.

Within time, groups of animals arise that lobby for the ethical treatment of humans. After years of bureaucratic resistance within AJTH, limits are set on the slaughter of humans, now brought to the brink of extinction. Occasionally, the human population rises in number and has to be thinned out to protect the environment from the humans' voracious grazing practices.)

Greg: Hi, Sasha.

Sasha: Hi, Greg. Would you like to groom my hair?

Greg: I'd like that. (He grooms Sasha with his tongue.)

Sasha: That feels great. You know, I really like this whole human-thing. I remember in a past life...

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

A WAKE

I stood above you
and looked down.
At least, the entire time,
I THOUGHT I was standing above...looking down.
Oh, my best friend,
you looked so pale
and insecure.
It had always frightened me
that you had known so much about me
from my dreams and ambitions
to my loves and my hates.
You could predict my actions
before I thought them--
and I knew you just as well.

Now we are strangers.

I went to touch your cheek
but pulled back--
frightened--
because your features were distorted
in a manner that I could not relate to.
You dropped the withered flower that you had been clutching--
the flower that symbolized our friendship--
And looked up at me--with frustration
in your alien eyes.
"I don't know what to do anymore," you told me.
"All we do is fight."
I looked away--ashamed of the truth.
"I know."

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

MEMORIAM

I remember a few years ago I sat down at my desk, ready for another day of Spanish II. I had a few minutes to waste before the tardy bell would ring so I nervously searched through my folders as if I had a purpose. That was the third day of school and I remember being as nervous as I was on the first day. Maybe it was because I still didn't know anyone in the class, but I made a promise to myself that day that I would say something to somebody besides a quick hello.

I thought that the person who sat in front of me seemed to be nice, so I figured that we would be able to become friends easily. His name was Walter Young, which I found out when the teacher called out our names for attendance the day before. Walter seemed real shy and always sat straight ahead in his chair never looking back. He had black hair and brown eyes that seemed to have so much hidden inside of them. The most distinguishing feature on him was his ears. They stuck out just enough to make them noticeable, but not enough to make him look funny.

When there were only about thirty seconds until the tardy bell would ring, I began to wonder where he was. He was usually in the classroom before I got in there. Then another student walked into the classroom.

"Did you guys hear that Walter Young committed suicide?" she asked.

The whole class looked stunned, but there were no tears. I guess nobody else in the class knew him very well either. I slowly looked up at the empty desk in front of me and realized that it would remain that way for the rest of the year.

Finally the teacher walked in and quickly told the class that the rumors about Walter were true--that he did kill himself. Then he proceeded to conduct the class as if nothing had happened. Like it was just an ordinary day. I wanted to talk about it. Find out why Walter committed suicide. I thought that we would learn more from dealing with a suicide than from learning a few Spanish words and pretending that it never happened.

Though the teacher continued to teach the class for the hours, I didn't learn anything new. I just couldn't stop thinking about Walter. That was the first person I ever knew that committed suicide, even though I never really knew him too well. I wondered what was his breaking point. What made him decide that his life wasn't worth living, that he couldn't take it anymore? I guess nobody will ever know for sure, and in a way that scary. I mean, I'm sure that most people have thought of committing suicide at least once and wondered what it would be like to just end it all, at least I know I have. Now what would have happened if at these times just one more problem came into my life? Would I have ended up just like

(continued)

Walter? Would I have found life too difficult to continue? I tried not to think about it.

Then I looked back in my life to the times when I thought of suicide and found it hard to explain to myself why I did think about it. All the reasons I used to have seemed so stupid. but I guess the main reason I thought about it is that I didn't feel wanted at the time. I didn't feel accepted. Even though I had the love of my family, I refused to accept it because I needed more. I needed a friend to tell things that you couldn't tell a parent. I needed someone to go places with on a Friday night. I needed someone to be there when I needed them, and sometimes that was hard to find. I wondered if that's why Walter killed himself. Was he lonely and just looking for a friend? Did he need a shoulder to cry on?

Then my thoughts were interrupted when I overheard someone whisper to his friend, "That was stupid of him to do. He's going to go to hell for killing himself."

I knew that he was talking about Walter, and that last sentence made my heart shiver.

"He's going to go to hell for killing himself." And he said it so bluntly, like he knew it for a fact. So I made a silent prayer to God.

"Why God? Why did you let Walter kill himself? I'm sure that all he wanted was to feel loved, so could you please forgive him for his mistake and take him up to heaven with you. Just hold him in your arms and love him forever."

The school bell rang just as I finished my prayer. I walked to my English class. Then the teacher walked in and conducted class as usual.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

SILENCE

Long after the silence
had settled
over our world
like a fresh snow
I wondered
what had caused
this unwanted abandonment.
I held the phone
in my hand
and studied the buttons
and contemplated the buttons
and contemplated the meaning
behind the arrangement of numbers
AND letters
But I never called.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

THE COMMON HOUSE CAT

Even though it lives under our feet, the great majority of us have ignored the tact that the common house cat is the most intelligent creature on earth. We think of our cats as lazy, lethargic furry carpets who purr and look appealing. We think they are cute playing their little cat games. We are totally taken in by their performance. Let us look carefully at their true behavior.

Sleeping. Every time you see a house cat, it is sleeping. This is a ploy by felines to make us think they require large amounts of sleep. In actuality, cats require only four hours of sleep per day. This they achieve by taking "cat naps" when humans are about. When humans are nowhere in sight, felines spend most of their time reading or playing bridge with other cats. This is evidenced by the fact that humans can never find a book where they left it, and the pages always look like someone has pawed through them. Game playing is evidenced by looking at a deck of cards from a feline household. Corners are torn off, and tears are often found because felines often bid slam with twelve points in their "hands." This causes "cat fights" with their partners.

Another thing people don't notice is that cats never eat their dry food. They turn up their noses and pad off until the keeper of the house is gone. Then they steal back to the food and feed it to the unsuspecting dog. Since most dogs are excessively stupid, they don't notice that, while they are busy chewing on Nine Lives, the cat is making a ham and cheese sandwich with mayo. (Kosher cats eat corned beef with no cheese or pastrami.) Often food that is unaccounted for has been eaten by the cat, especially the last of anything. The last cup of coffee, piece of cake or pie, scoop of ice cream, piece of pizza, and especially lunchmeat, are all favorites of felines. When your mother queries, "Who ate that _____ I was saving for dinner?" no one answers. Humans are not guilty. The cat ate it.

Another common myth about cats is that they hate water. Every time you leave your house, your cat fills your bathtub with warm water and goes for a swim followed by a shower. This is why the drain is always clogged with hair, and there is never any soap left.

Cats also use our cars at night to go to secret meetings. This is why we are always out of gas in the morning. In order to be sure we don't wake up while they're gone, they turn off the alarms on our clocks. This is why we're always late. A new practice might be to lock the cat in the bathroom at night instead of "putting the cat out."

When felines get lonely, they take money from our wallets and purses and go to "cat houses." This is why we always have less money than we think we had.

Cats are sneaky, but the sneakiest things they do

(continued)

happen at the secret meetings. First, the great cat, called the "Catter," springs atop a great column called a "Catterpillar." Then, using his voice, he causes a great barrier to rise between the felines and the outside world. This is known as "Catter-walling." Next, they all raise their voices in a "catcaphony" of sound, wailing the names of humans who have learned of the true nature of the cat. These humans are captured and beaten to death with a cat-o-nine-tails. I am writing this from hiding in order to inform humans of the threat that lives among them. I've become *persona non gato*. If they get me, it will be a catastrophe, because I cannot then warn you of future plots.

In the future, when you are charmed into thinking felines are lazy and stupid, remember that your cat is sleeping in your bed, eating the food you provided, and doing exactly what he wants.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE WITH PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE ALL AROUND ME PEOPLE
PEOPLE I AM STILL ALONE PEOPLE
PEOPLE WITHOUT YOU PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE
PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE PEOPLE

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

REINCARNATION

And here I was.
Here I found myself
in this pink and god ballroom
that I have visited so often
in my dreams.
The blonde chanteuse
stepped aside.
And the tenor sax
took center stage in a wailing solo
that pierced the night.

§§§§§

Katrina Brock

LET ME LIVE...

I'm fourteen years old, and I've run away--
just two weeks ago today--
Now they tell me what's inside me's a life--
but it's just a fetus developing in pain and strife.--
A baby conceived in misery--
now again some want to take my choice from me--

It may be selfish, and I'm told it's helpless--
but I hate this thing inside--
for me a reminder of each night I cried.

They say my case is such a shame--
but only a low statistic, they don't see the name--
They all judge and advise me--
yet none stop long enough to see--
it was my father that put this child in me.

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

THOUGHTLESS

i thought i had a freind who cared
through all times bad and good
a friend who always shared her heart
in every way she could.

i though i had a friend who knew
what made me laugh or cry.
a friend who was a friend so true
she'd never ask me "why?"

i thought i had a friend who tried
to find some hope in all.
a friend who felt the pain, and cried
when someone else would fall.

i though i had a friend who broke
her heart so one could mend.
a friend like you, who always spike
the words said by a friend.

that's what i get for thinking...

§§§§§

James Wolverton

NOT READY

Doors stand closed,
silent,
Intriguing,
I don't understand the meaning
Must I finish other chapters of my life
before I move on?
Light beckons.
I question the idea,
What is there?
Still afraid, I turn away,
retreat to the beginning.
Sit down, rest awhile,
I'm still not ready.
Try another day,
Sonny Boy.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

OLD REFRAIN

We hear the soft rhythm
of ancient mountains
rolling off
to the horizon
in smooth peaks,
an undulating cadence
as hypnotic as the tide.
We feel the Mesmer's words
trickle in
on the notes of his
saxophone voice--
a command we cannot repeat
but understand well,
the knowing as exciting
as static electricity
over the hairs on our bodies.
We touch briefly
scramble in the darkness
to find the thing we cannot describe,
which may not exist.
We continue predictable motions
swaying to melodies
as though we were elegant:
I wish it were possible.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

SOMETIMES

Sometimes,
When I'm simply thinking,
A burst of energy
And love
Escapes the solitude,
And I move
Slightly
Closer to you.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

CADENCES

We lie still
silent in the shadowed room.
The moon pours ivory light
thick as cream
slowly over our bodies.
The furnace stutters
in the belly of the house;
your breathing warms
tickles my neck
cautiously.
In winter
we wrap ourselves tightly
against late evening's chest
and listen to time
measure itself out.

§§§§§

Peg Skyberg

GETTING OLD

As a child
I felt
so lost
unsure
lonely.
As a teen
I felt
afraid
uncertain
changing.
As a young adult
I felt
grown up
uneasy
searching.
As I'm aging
I feel
loving
knowing
content.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

THIS TIME

Off the heavy sighs and sways
of labors weight to swing.
In the state of days and days,
crying the time away,
to keep their hands;
slap, clapping in muse.
Upon this face
of a mortal race
sifting through sands,
trapped in a glass,
to escape a reflection
of the past;
never to win,
never to lose
clocks tock
rocking,
a tic.

§§§§§

Walter Coffey

VINDICATION

When the time of reckoning is at hand
I don't know where I'll be
But being in hell would be better
Than having you in heaven with me
Your ripped out my heart, put it on a pan
And cooked it for my dinner
So if loving you is a holy thing
Then I'll admit that I'm a sinner
You dealt out the cards with one up your sleeve
To help the cards that were in your hand
And when you lay that ace upon me
All my dreams skipped away like sand
All the memories are garbage
Now only instincts will get me by
But if it wasn't for you
I wouldn't have to sit alone and wonder why
All I wanted was a smile but I'd be dead
If it were true that looks could kill
And if talk is cheap then you're as genuine
As the sludge on a three-dollar bill
The price to pay is heavy
When you know you've lost the game
If that were true I'd be deep in debt
And you'd be basking in fame
Vindicated or not, I just can't tell
So go to hell

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

THEY TELL ME I SHOULD BE HAPPY

They tell me I should be
Happy
With what I've got,
But the point is,
I'm not.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

A SHOE BOX FULL OF SNAKES

She was attracted to him out of pure jealousy. She knew she was no one--no thoughts, no ideas, not even a personality. She knew he was someone.

He was of average height, build, and beauty. It was the way he twisted his normality into individuality that incensed her. His arms were always full of books, his clothing casual and unique, and his thoughts ever in action through conversations with various types of people. She hated him.

By change she caught the title of a book in his hand one morning. That night she bought the book, read it, and practiced the art of discussing impressions with another. The person she chose to talk to was the clerk at the store after she returned the book. There was no real need for it anymore, although she did write down its title and author on a fresh sheet of notebook paper. The discussion was meaningless as well; simple training.

When, several weeks later, she noticed a shirt similar to his in a local shop, she bought it and discarded a shirt of her won. She followed this procedure for months, integrating his wardrobe into hers, taking account of the changing seasons, checking for details in fabric and color, throwing away the bland fashions of her past.

She continued reading whenever she discovered the titles he carried. the notebook paper list grew to twenty, thirty, forty books.

Her conversations improved slightly. She talked to librarians, teachers, relatives, strangers; always about books. Whenever the talk turned, she could not comprehend, and quit.

A few of the books led to a knowledge of music. While she had initiative of her own, she assumed he read about musicians he admired, and so bought all of the artists' albums, not sure which in particular he owned.

It was after the addition of music to her program that she began to get noticed. Where before there had been a form blending into the wallpaper there was now a person. Someone. An individual, they thought, but wait...doesn't she seem perfect for him? They're so much alike--the clothes, the walk, look at the book she's holding; and that song--isn't it his favorite?

(continued)

They wanted to talk to her, hear her thoughts and ideas. And she talked back, like a wind-up doll--now books, now music, now him.

Of course he was interested. What is better for the ego than an exact replica of oneself to spend time with? Her reading list increased under his direction, her music knowledge grew, and movies, clubs, restaurants, friends, and a social life were added.

Conversations with others were easy now, knowing so many facets of him. Alone, they had only him. Having sex with her was like masturbating--she *was* him.

She began to eat away what little of his personality was left until she was satisfied. His individuality was straightened back into normality. He became bland, crawling through his surroundings with nothing new to offer. She kept him like an ordinary garden snake in a shoebox, while she shed her skins in the sunlights.

They never noticed he was gone; she was someone so special. A few times she vaguely reminded them of another, but who? They couldn't remember.

She was of average height, build, and beauty. Her arms were always full of any combination of the eighty books she kept listed on a torn and yellowed sheet of notebook paper. Her clothing was casual and unique, and thoughts, although stolen, were ever in action through conversations with various types of people. She had a seasoned personality with no evidence of hatred or jealousy present.

He hated her.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

WHAT DO YOU THINK???

You say you want me Red
You say you want me Yellow
You say you want me Orange, Pink or Blue
You say you want me anything but who I am with you
So ask me, ask me what do I think, what do I think
What do I think of you
What could I, would I, should I think of you...
What do you think?

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

SELFLESS

If you're looking for love,
Put pride on the shelf,
For you can't find love
'Til you lose yourself.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

I BELIEVE

I believe
in the Nursery Magic Fairy
and I believe
in fate.
I believe
distance doesn't matter
and
that it's never too late.
I believe
through time you can
conquer your fears
and
let our love grow
to be true,
because I believe
what the Skin Horse says
and I believe in
you.

§§§§§

Dawn Simmons

FAITH

I've been told
that it never goes away.
It's just that some days it will bother me
and other days it won't.
Today I wake up with a smile
that holds back the tears.

Shoebox falls off the shelf.
Its contents spill out.
Letters.
Ticket stubs.
Photographs.
You catch me and hold me captive
in your emerald gaze.
I am frozen in time.
I sit hypnotized
and stare at your bold expression
but my vision is soon clouded
by the tears I can no longer hold back.

(I figure that this is one of the days
when it will bother me.)

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

INSPIRATION

You look at life
With such cheer.
Friendly smiles given
To strangers who walk by,
Even a smile for me.
I wonder how you do it.
How do you remain so happy?
You must not be living in reality.
Because in reality,
Everything isn't all candy and roses.
So you must be living
In a wonderful world
Created by your soul.
And I was just wondering,
Could you take me there?

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

DISCOVERY

Lying flat
I feel myself sink
into warm soil;
parts of me dissolve;
I am earth
again.
I lose consciousness
evaporate into the cosmic heart
become the Transcendent Thought
apart from
connected to
the All.
Sometimes I know
what death is like;
sometimes I know
everything.

Lying flat
I hear midnight's talons
scratch at the windows--
parts of me cringe;
I am skin
again.
A razor-edged awareness
cuts through me;
fear stings in the wound.
At these times
I know only life;
at these times I know
everything.

§§§§§

Sherry Gunderman

DA-DA ISM

I bumped into you
(Not literally)
And you smiled warmly
and said "hello."

You walked with me to class
and made insignificant smalltalk
(that you initiated)
and smiled
at my wry humor.

Can you hear my heartbeat?
Loud. Fast.
(I feel like Poe.)
Uncontrollable.

"What IS your name?"
my mind screams.
"Another exciting day of class,"
my mouth says.

You stand aside
and let me enter first--
Oh, the modern chivalry!
And I kick myself
For not keeping the conversation alive.

We take our seats
and anonymity returns.
I see you watching me
through the corner of your eye.

You adjust your glasses
and smile smugly
at my blatant stare.
Please speak to me.
I'm so outgoing. So loud.
And I've chosen you
to be the object
of my infatuation.

Why am I so intimidated?

§§§§§

J. Ardith Cox

WISHFUL THINKING

The glitter on the falling snow
And sparkle in the lights
Can't grant my only Christmas wish...
To be with you tonight.

§§§§§

Bob Loewe

ARROGANCE

Arrogance
Proud strutting, chest beating
Arrogance
Not a simple petty
Everyday selfish
Arrogance
This is a great
Arrogance
To be shared
Arrogance
Bombastic
Climb that mountain
You can do anything
Arrogance
Centers around you
Arrogance
Makes the world
Revolve around you

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

MYSELF

I met a stranger who was myself and I ask him, "where are you going?" and he replied he didn't know. He said he had to be going and again I ask, "where?" Then as he walked away he lifted his head and turned and said, "to find you."

§§§§§

Rich Goberville

THE ROSE

Some people view life
as if it were a rose
and one must endure hardships, or the thorns
in order to obtain happiness, or the flower
but if you really wanted to,
couldn't you buy your rose from a flower shop
and ask them to cut the thorns off for you?

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

BOUND TO BE FREE

My burden is that of Atlas
and the bird in my pocket;
bound for now is my soul.

§§§§§

David L. Sullivan

DEPRESSION

Depression
Is such a wasting thing
A wild, gnashing lesion
Devouring mercilessly
As if the human soul
Were a dish *a la carte*.

§§§§§

Melynda Findlay

UNTITLED

Shivering and cold, I cuddle towards my security blanket (I named him "Jeff"). I suppose to anyone else he's not much to look at--a little worn, a little ragged, but he's all mine. His strong arms wrap tightly around me and instantly I am surrounded by his warmth. One day I think to myself that maybe I am taking advantage of my blanket--taking all of his warmth and comfort and not returning any to him. So I asked him, "Do you love me?"

"Why do you ask?" he replied.

"Just wondering."

"Well..."

He never gave me a straight answer, but then again, he never did; I don't know what I was expecting from him. That was the day that I burned my blanket; his indefinite answer gave me a clear picture of exactly what he was thinking. Setting the flame was so easy; I watched him burn. I heard him scream agonizing, painful screams. I just laughed.

All that remains of my blanket now is a few charred memories. I keep them hidden away in a box (I named it "subconscious"). I take Jeff out of subconscious every now and then and I remember the fire. I shiver and I'm cold. I guess it's time to find a new blanket.

§§§§§

Jay J. Kaylin

WISHING

I went to this wishing well
and when I was ready
I reached in my pocket
and pulled out a penny
I wished to be free
and do as I pleased
I wished I could cry
without being teased
and I wished for my sister
not to hit me in the head...
Then I wished that maybe
I might have a dime
to drop in instead.

§§§§§

Maria Mellinger

HE TALKS TO HIMSELF

He talks to himself
Knowing she never listens,
Hoping she'll overhear.
She remains silent,
Knowing he never listens,
Hoping he'll overhear.

§§§§§

Joseph M. Nahas

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

It was the night after Christmas,
and all through the house,
not a creature was stirring,
but the faucet wouldn't stop dripping.

§§§§§

Judy Belfield

RETROSPECT

A frosty breath sings through
brown grasses;
they flutter like a lover's heart.
I feel deep sighs again heaving in the earth's chest;
the ride is smooth,
rolling out to the ends of imagination
in a steady rhythm
as predictable as tide.
I hear sad songs again,
a litany of pain:
lost love,
dead love,
love never born;
I ache with the melodies
in the center of me,
in the middle place
which has no voice of its own
but experiences being
in highly compressed time
poised a moment away from catastrophe.
I watch my breath spread in the cold air
and disappear.

§§§§§

Alex Bennett

JUSTICE

Stealthily, the small figure jumped the five foot gap between the rooftops landing on the other side without a sound. The figure looked over the side of the building, down into the streets below, making sure the larger figure hadn't seen or heard him. The man was still walking with a slight hunch slowly through the sparse crowd. The kid's face broke into a smile, the few remaining rays of light shone off his teeth. Then he continued following, creeping across the rooftop ever quietly. The man came to an intersection, then turned right off the main street into a narrow alley--the same size as every other alley in the city. The alley ran alongside the building the kid was on, and again the kid's face broke into a smile. He followed nimbly along the edge of the rooftop keeping an eye more on the man than his way.

The man continued, passing alleyway after alleyway, the kid following by jumping from building to building. Every building was the same except for maybe a few feet in height. The kid had lived here all his life and had grown strong limbs accustomed to jumping from building to building. The man moved closer to the sea and docks and the smell of sea water became more and more intense. This didn't falter either the kid or

(continued)

man; both knew this pathway by heart.

The closer to the sea the man got, the more dense the alley got. Sailors and warriors walked in groups to bars in an already drunken stupor. The warriors usually visited this end of the city when they were off their shift at the battlements surrounding the city, especially on weekends. The sailors were always here after getting off their ships that had been on the water for weeks, sometimes months. This was the biggest port in the twelve lands for the great river Osgoth emptied into the sea. It started in the mountains at Carciathe, flowed through the underground Dwarven cities, across the Sheffold Plains, around the vast Aelmon Forest, then down till it emptied into the Great Sea at Carseth--the city of the sea. Along the way, the four major rivers--Shemd, Zandip, Tiennus, and Argath--joined the Osgoth, along with hundreds of lesser rivers, streams, and brooks. This vast network allowed sea travel to reach almost every end of the Twelve Lands. unfortunately, while at one time it was almost entirely noble and godlike, Carseth was becoming a city that bred thieves, cutthroats, and evil of almost every kind. Most of the wealthy merchants abandoned the city and lived in neighboring towns--but still within Carseth's protection. This part of the city was known for its whorehouses, making it the most desirable attraction for the sailors when they docked. It was into this part that the man walked with the kid right behind.

The sun finally sank totally, leaving the dirty, dank streets into a blessed darkness. Now was the time for the real population of the city, the thieves, muggers, prostitutes, and burglars to make their living. The man quickened his step, trying to get into a more populated area before the complete darkness set in. The kid, however, relaxed and smiled a third time, for he knew where the man was going. The man went on ahead into busy alleys where the brothels stood. The boy did not worry; he did not plan for the man's death until later anyway. The man went into a building, finally pulling back the hood on his brown cloak and smiling after being admitted by the two bouncers and the pimp that controlled the brothel. This was the widest known and most profitable brothel in the city, for it had many many young girls--some under thirteen--that were an irresistible attraction for many older men. The kid watched the entry from the top of the building directly across the street. Then he sat down directly across from the front of the brothel.

Jaret sat back on his haunches watching more men being admitted by the bouncer. They were both imposing figures, each being well over six feet tall, normal for their race--Casak. Both men had massive, muscular bodies, and each held a large mace in their arms. Jaret hated both of them, for he had to live with them. Often, when they weren't watching the door, they used him for entertainment to the waiting guests. Usually they threw him back and forth, often with no clothes on him. he would get back at them, someday, just as he would get back at the man tonight. This wasn't the first night he followed him. He had been doing it for a month , tracking the man from the brothel to his house. he memorized the paths the man took, the times he left, and the best places to attack. The man followed three paths. he took a different one every night. Jaret knew them all, and he knew the one the man would take tonight.

Jaret sat back and watched the stars as they came out one by one. He knew the man would be in there a long time, for he was known to be exceptionally sadistic and took his time with his women. He always paid extra, thus the pimp allowed him these extra desires, even though no woman actually wanted to see the man even for the extra money.

Jaret watched the stars longer, chewing on a stick that he had taken from his pocket. he often did this when he thought, unknowingly keeping his teeth an exceptional white from chewing. he thought of the great tales he heard in taverns when he was able to sneak in. Tales from the different races of men, the elves, dwarves, and halflings that performed great feats or noble deeds in battle. Eathel, son of Eamer, the great king that defeated the Orcish blackfinger clan in the first battle of the Twelve Lands and drove them out of the Sheffold Plains. Jaret wondered who his father was, if it was a great king or hero that he could proudly put after his name. That was a joke, he knew, for his own mother didn't know who it was. She had been the main attraction in this brothel a year before she had him. No, he was Jaret, son of the Twelve Lands. He watched the stars, dreaming of great things--it was his only escape from the streets. That would change tonight, he thought, for it was the beginning of his own book of great deeds.

After a while, he broke his gaze from the stars and glanced at the brothel. Noises of the party inside echoed across the street as more and more people went in. Very few men were turned away. The bottom floor of the brothel was a large bar. The bar alone attracted many to the building, and the night was getting into full swing. Jaret reached under his shirt and grabbed the hilt of the dagger. He pulled it out, sheath and all, till he could see it in the starlight. Then he slid the blade from the brown sheath and gazed at it. It was the type issued to the guard of the city, bearing the city's symbol at the end of the hilt. Jaret watched the reflection of the polished edge of the blade. He then checked the sharpness of the blade by drawing his thumb sideways along the blade. he felt it scratch the skin, almost drawing blood, then stopping before it cut. He sneered. He had been waiting for this chance a long time. Now, with the dagger, the chance presented itself.

Jaret had gotten the dagger two days ago, stealing it

(continued)

from a city guard who had passed out from a night of fun. The guard was aleep, passed out across a table when Jaret took it. He was proud of his accomplishment, for it was the first time that he had actually performed the robbery. Starting when he was six, he had acted as lookout for the older boys in his gang. Once in a while, he was allowed to carry off the loot, but most often he was just used as a watch. The older kids had always done the actual robbery and kept all of the good loot. Now, almost three years later, he was going out on his own. He saw the dagger, took the chance, and succeeded in getting it without anyone knowing. Again he was going out on his own. He hadn't told anyone in his gang about this second robbery he had planned. This man was his. He was the one. he followed hi, he watched him, and he hated this man. Besides, the loot would be all his. Form some reason, he didn't see the loot as being the real motivation behind this. It was basically hatred--or justice. He knew this man--for he was a regular at his mother's brother--usually he was there four times a week. He was a sick, perverted man who loved beating his women until they bled, often leaving them permanently scarred. He always chose the youngest one, beating her with such intensity they then passed out. Although Jaret had no love lost for his mother, or any other person in the whorehouse, he felt he couldn't let this continued. He would end it. Jaret sheathed the dagger and put it back under his shirt, concentrating on his chewstick.

Jaret watched the brothel earnestly now, for the man was due to appear any time. Jaret watched the men go in and out--mostly sailors from the far lands. Tall men from Casok and Shimel, strong men from Toglith, short from Mal Opshel and Norest. He didn't see any from the other two races of men, but he saw several halflings and a few Dwarves. He never saw an Elf, the tall, fair people from the Land's Woods. He always wanted to see an Elf, and even more so to meet one, but he never had. It was his greatest wish to meet one and live in one of their great forest cities.

People kept going in and out, but Jaret paid them no notice. Finally, he sat up and watched intently. He recognized one figure. The man walked out, looked both ways, then hurried across the street into the alley next to the building. Jaret took the stick out of his mouth and threw it down, then turned to follow the man. He sneered, for tonight was the night--everything was perfect. Jaret followed the man the same way he had before, staying back in the shadows of the roof and moving silently. All was perfect. The man did not notice he was being followed, and the moon was not out, so the only light was the stars. That suited Jaret, for he basically lived by the night and could see by the stars. Jaret was as nocturnal as any bat, and it seemed to many that he had the Elven gift of night sight. Jaret didn't but he did see exceptionally well in deep night. That was his greatest advantage over the man.

The man walked quickly now, passing building after building. Jaret followed as before, leaping from rooftop to rooftop with the greatest ease, landing silently as ever. Finally, the man came to the main street and crossed into the alley beyond. But now Jaret didn't follow. Instead he turned right and scampered across the roof. He got to the other side, then followed the wall until he found what he was looking for. He bent down and picked up a coiled rope that he borrowed from the gang's supplies and tied it around a stake he had pounded into the roof earlier. Then he threw the rope over the side and followed, climbing down the rope as quickly and quietly as he could into the alley below. It was in this alley that Jaret planned his ambush. He located this spot when he followed the man before. On this night, the man walked a path that continued zigzagging the main street. He could pass up the main street and go into an alley, then take that to the first intersection and turn right. Then, at the next alley, the man turned back towards the main street. He would cross it and go into the alley beyond, then make another U-turn back to the street. Jaret hid the dangling rope in a crevice made by the gutter of the building. Satisfied that the rope was hidden well enough, Jaret walked to the middle of the alley. On the building on the left side, there was a small, three step stairway that was parallel to the street and led to the building's cellar. No light was in this part of the alley, making it almost impossible to see more than ten feet in front. At the end, however, light from the street lamps filtered in, silhouetting all those that passed--or walked into--the alley. Jaret stood on the bottom step, watching the main street. Jaret was completely hidden from view since only the top of his head could be seen over the stairway and the blanket of darkness covered this up.

Now, Jaret just watched and waited. It was time to see if he was right--if this was the path the man chose. Jaret had no doubt--he was sure of himself. He calmly drew the dagger from its sheath and waited. He had seen this moment before, but he wasn't actually in it. He had been lookout as his gang preyed their victims. He knew what it was like to wait and it didn't bother him any more. He never liked working for the gang, they always attacked helpless easy prey. Many of these people were old, weak, or just drunk and they never fought back. They always seemed to be paralyzed by their fear--always unable to do anything about it. Jaret never felt a sense of honor--as if there was in thieving, or satisfaction. But he did need to survive, so he contained his feelings, and did what he was told. He always felt pity though. He pitied those poor people that couldn't act for themselves, couldn't defend themselves. Watching these people, Jaret made up his mind long ago that he would never be weak like them. He would not feel any fear, he would just see that he

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would get out of the situation. He would depend upon himself and only himself. He lost his feeling of fear, and he never felt any. Even now, he felt no fear. He only felt that he thought he was doing right. It was a good thing.

Jaret tried to imagine where the man was. he figured that the man would be moving towards him now. He studied the street carefully now, watching for that familiar figure. Few people passed, mainly groups of drunken sailors and soldiers, loud and unruly. Finally, Jarret could see the figure cautiously approaching. The man was in the middle of the street when Jaret saw him. A flickering light from the torches cast a strange glow around him. Soon, the man's silhouette covered up most o f the light and the he stepped into the alley> Jaret smiled again--with the knowledge of being right--and plastered himself up against the wall of the stairwell.

The sound of the man now pervaded Jaret's senses, the constant shuffling of feet against stone echoed in the alley. Jaret turned the dagger over into an underhand grip, having the bladeguard at his wrist and the blade against his forearm. Jare held it in his right hand, close to his body to shield any reflections of the metal, and peered up. He faced the same direction his victim walked. This way he could surprise him from behind. The shuffling became louder now, and Jaret finally felt some emotion. His heart beat faster in anticipation. All his senses strained for any amount of information about his victim. He smiled. How he loved this feeling. His muscles were all taut, his reflexes coiled. The shuffling got closer and closer until the man finally passed. Jaret sprang.

The man passed about two feet from the stairway and three feet from the other building. Jaret leapt up over the top of the stairwell behind the man, then drove forward, somersaulted underneath the man's cloak, and stopped between his legs. Before the man reacted, Jaret stood up with his face in the small of the man's back and his left arm around the man's left leg. His right arm was curled between the man's legs with the dagger pointed inwards--just above the man's groin. Instantly the man stopped walking, fear running through his veins.

"What do you want?" he asked quickly, his voice cracking as the fear surfaced in his throat.

But Jaret didn't respond. Instead he tried to stab but was stopped. Not by the man; he knew he had him, but Jaret couldn't move his right arm. Granted, at this point, his heart raced, but he felt no fear. Instead, he felt that stupid pity. This was too easy. He had a helpless victim and pity kept him from killing the man. The man must have sensed something, for the initial fear left and he wasn't helpless any longer. The man squeezed his thighs together, effectively trapping Jaret's arm between his legs. At the same time, he reached down and grabbed the end of the hilt that Jaret's hand barely covered. He wrenched it from Jaret's grip, then twisted his body so that he could kick Jaret with his left leg. Jaret, surprised at the man's quickness, could not stop the blow and took the kick in his left side, between his hip and rib cage. He tumbled over and hit the wall opposite the stairwell. the man turned to face him and Jaret looked up. Both saw each other's eyes in the dim light. The man's eyes had a look of recognition and surprise. Jaret's had a look of satisfaction. He felt satisfaction in the fact that the man was not helpless, but instead, challenging.

The man's look changed from surprise to a perverted confidence with an evil smile. "You're the little cur from the whorehouse, aren't you?" he started. "Thought you could kill me, did you? Well it's time I bet you like I did your mother long ago." With that, he reached into his cloak. Still holding the dagger in his left hand, he slowly removed a cat-o-nine-tails with his right.

"I beat a girl tonight to the edge of death, you little bastard. Beating you will fulfill that desire I couldn't get, that special desire of death," he slurred. He had a perverted smile on his face as he snapped the cat-o-nine-tails, the sound echoing in the cramped alley. Jaret said nothing. Instead, he got up and smiled in return as he crouched in this new challenge. He could run, but he didn't want to. Instead, he wanted to destroy this man. He felt his heart beating faster than before, and he felt that euphoria that followed. Patiently, he followed the man's circle, matching him step for step. This is what he wanted, a challenge instead of a victim. To others, this scene might look hopeless, but the Jaret it was even. The man had the advantage of size, strength, and two weapons, but Jaret had the advantage of eight years of fighting and speed. That was all Jaret needed.

jaret waited for the man's first move. They had circled until they were in the center of the alley, parallel to the wall. Bolstered by a false confidence and a perverted desire, the man lunged forward. his attack was clumsy. He overextended himself and put himself off-balance. jaret easily avoided this attack by jumping left towards the wall. the leather straps of the cat-o-nine-tails passed harmlessly over Jaret's head and he reached the wall. Jaret turned and faced his attacker again.

The man recovered, embarrassed at the ease of which a child dodged the attack, and faced Jaret. Rage now seethed through the man's body and he started to attack again, this time snapping the cat-o-nine-tails at Jaret's feet, seeking to entangle him. Again, Jaret avoided the clumsy attack, this time jumping above the snapping straps. And so they went, Jaret just moving around avoiding the attacks, buying time and letting the man's anger encompass him. The man did exactly as Jaret hoped, getting madder and madder. If there was one thing Jaret had learned in all the street fights, it was to not allow his anger to control him, and never ever to underestimate an opponent. The man's clumsy attacks

(continued)

grew even worse, heightened by the fact that he was getting tired. Jaret wasn't even to his second wind yet. Jaret worked his way so that he was against a building with the stairwell directly across and the man right between. Jaret smiled openly. Now was the time to strike back.

The man gave up trying to whip Jaret and instead, moved forward trying to tackle him. Jaret did the one thing the man did not expect. He jumped forward, rolling into a somersault. Jaret timed it perfect, for he rolled under the man's arms and was stopped by the man's cloak on his back, with his feet up between the man's legs. The man stopped and straightened up trying to jump away. He was not quick enough, and Jaret sprung the trap. When the man stood up he spread his legs enough to give Jaret a good target. Jaret kicked both his legs straight up, the limber muscles snapping with amazing strength, and hit the man full in the groin. Instinctively, the man dropped both the cat-o-nine-tails and the dagger, then grabbed his groin with both hands. With a groan, the man sunk to his knees. Jaret moved immediately after the kick, somersaulting backwards and coming up on his feet. Jaret stood in front of the man and let him sink to his knees. Jaret looked at the man straight in the eyes with a look of satisfaction. The man, this time, had a look of intense pain, his mouth opening and closing without uttering a sound. Jaret cocked back his left hand and swung as hard as he could. Jaret's fist smacked the man in the nose, breaking open healing scabs on his knuckles. His punch wasn't hard enough to knock the man out, but it was enough to knock him back into the stairwell. The man landed on his head, putting him into a state of semi-consciousness. Jaret scooped up the dagger, then followed the man into the stairwell. He jumped up, then landed as hard as he could on the man's stomach with both knees. Air rushed from the man's lungs, taking away his breath. The man gasped to fill his lungs, but Jaret saved him the trouble. In one quick motion, he stabbed the man's heart, killing him quickly. Jaret had been taught that method and seen it before, when the older gang members killed someone. The man gasped one last time, groping the air for anything. Then the man died. Jaret stared in a trance. He had never killed a man before, he never knew so much blood could come from one wound. He felt nothing, only a satisfaction and justice. He ended the torture of others with that stab. He felt good about that.

Jaret snapped from the trance, realizing he had to get out of there. He searched the man, not expecting to find anything with the thought that the man spent all his money earlier. To his surprise, he found a money pouch that was still half full. Jaret pulled it off the belt, snapping the leather straps that held it on. Jaret padded down the body. Inside the man's right boot was a dagger. Jaret pulled it out and examined it. To his glee, he found it was richly made, with small writings on the blade. Jaret sheathed it, then pocketing the pipe and money and clutching the dagger, he hopped out of the stairwell and ran to the rope. He left his old dagger and the cat-o-nine-tails behind as well as the body. He climbed the rope, then untied it from the top. He threw the end out far into the alley, then turned and ran the other way. While Jaret saw or heard no one, he still moved as quickly as possible.

Jaret jumped from rooftop to rooftop, running in the clear night with a smile--the first real, happy smile. Jaret felt exhilarated, knowing he had defeated great odds and was unscathed. Now he wasn't sure what feeling was better--before or after the fight. Jaret had his own tale to tell, maybe not now, but sooner or later. He ran with abandon, clutching the dagger in one hand, the other swinging freely. He ran away from the sea, towards the city's largest building. The church could be seen from everywhere in town, and Jaret went there often. He jumped from the last rooftop, standing before the church.

Jaret climbed up the church to his favorite perch--the seventh level. The church was built basically as block on top of the other--just like a pyramid. The bottom block was huge, then the second a little smaller, and so on for twelve tiers, one tier representing each land. Jaret sat on the wall, facing the sea. He came here often, for it was the only place that Jaret felt any true sanctuary. From this level, he could see both the city and sea. Jaret felt safe sitting here, confident, almost majestic.

He set his treasure beside him but without examining it more. Instead, he took out a chewstick and watched the sky. The darkest of night was over, and soon the sun would rise. The bell above, small but magical, rang to signal the changing of the guard. Jaret just sat still, truly happy, gnawing on the stick. By the time the sun rose, Jaret was fast asleep--dreaming of future tales with his name appearing in them all.

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Then it hit me.